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TINY COMPO: What's the full title of the Episode III movie?

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THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR



New Year's Revolution

I think you'll agree that 2004 was one of the best years for PC games ever. *Half-Life 2* and *Rome: Total War* show the strides that PC games

have taken, and for me, represent the pinnacle of gaming, period. But it's going to get better. Next-gen consoles are still more than a year off, but 2005 marks the leap into full-on DX9 gaming on the PC, and the future looks stunning. To prove the point, we've scoured the globe for exclusive screenshots and information on all the biggest games of next year, including the world's first shots from the *Star Wars* RTS that could finally deliver what others have only promised. When I heard that ex-Westwood people were working on a new *Star Wars* licence, I knew that any talk of next year's games would be hollow without this behemoth on the cover.

Breaking gargantuan games like this is one of the best bits of the job and testament to the stature *PC ZONE* has the world over. But it can be a hairy business. A day before the cover was due at the printers, I got a call from Activision to say that the game was so new, the name hadn't been officially sanctioned. "Erm, OK, what should I put on the cover? 'Star Wars RTS?' 'Star Wars XXX?' 'Star Wars: F*** Knows, Your Guess Is As Good As Mine?' Help Me Out Here..."

Luckily the issue was resolved overnight, and for now at least, the name of the game is *Star Wars: Empire At War*. It might change. It might stay the same. But one thing it proves is that if you want to know about the biggest games first, there's only one magazine to buy. And that's my New Year's resolution to you – to keep *ZONE* at least one step ahead of the competition in 2005. And to give up smoking. Again.

Happy New Year.

Dave Woods

Dave Woods
Editor

The secret strategy epic from the makers of *Command & Conquer*!

P30



COVER DISCS P136 →

■ DEMOS AND MOVIES!

Gory, neck-biting vampire action game *BloodRayne 2* and animated fun with *The Incredibles*. Plus! Footage from the biggest games of 2005 including *Battlefield 2*, *Republic Commando* and *Black & White 2*!

■ DVD EXCLUSIVES

Demos of *Immortal Cities: Children Of The Nile*, *Kohan II: Kings Of War* and *Armies Of Exigo* (multiplayer). Plus! Essential demos such as *Doom 3*, the best Indie Zone games and much more!



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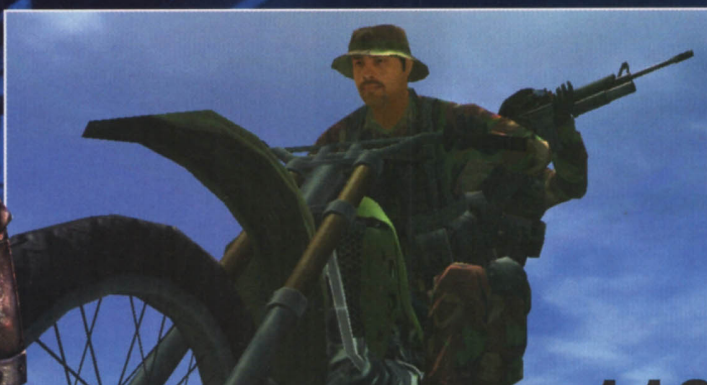
"Whatever Crytek announces next is sure to have us reeling..."



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PCZONE

FUTURE PUBLISHING
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LONDON W1U 6FP

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Printed in the UK by Southern Print
Distribution Marketforce (UK)

EPISODES I-III

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Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th Floor, Low Rise Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London, SE1 9LS. Tel 0207 633 3300

Printed in the UK by Wyndeham Heron Ltd, The Bentall Complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge, Malden, Essex, CM9 7NW

Future Publishing is part of The Future Network plc. The Future Network produces carefully targeted specialist magazines for people who share a passion. We aim to satisfy that passion by creating titles offering value for money, reliable information, smart buying advice and which are a pleasure to read. Today we publish more than 100 magazines in the UK, US, France and Italy. Over 100 international



editions of our magazines are also published in 30 other countries across the world.

The Future Network plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FNET)

Managing Director UK Robert Price
Non-Executive Chairman Roger Parry
Chief Executive Greg Inglisham
Group Finance Director John Bowman
www.thefuturenetworkplc.co.uk

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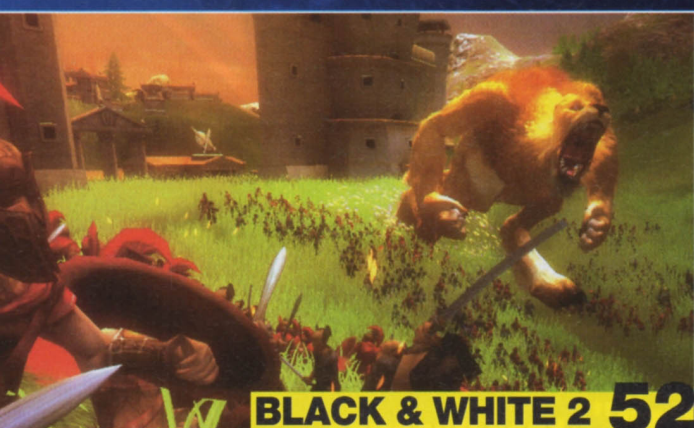
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NEXT ISSUE: PCZ #152

On sale February 3. Miss it and miss out.

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WIN! **TINY COMPO** Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (151), PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6PP. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: February 2, 2005. The winner of our December Tiny Compo (149) was Daniel Heslop from Sydenham who may have tiny handwriting, but also knows his LOTR trivia. Shadowfax was Gandalf's horse. He wins some free stuff!

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!





Escape from the Ordinary

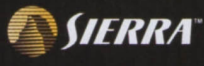


"Absolutely stunning" Xbox Magazine

Available on PC December 2004 with exclusive content



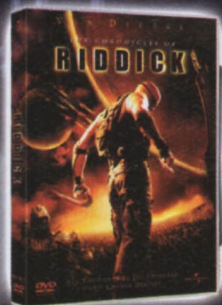
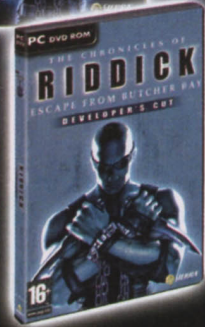
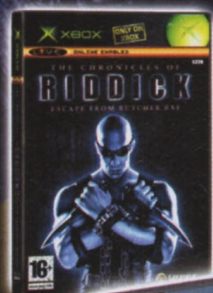
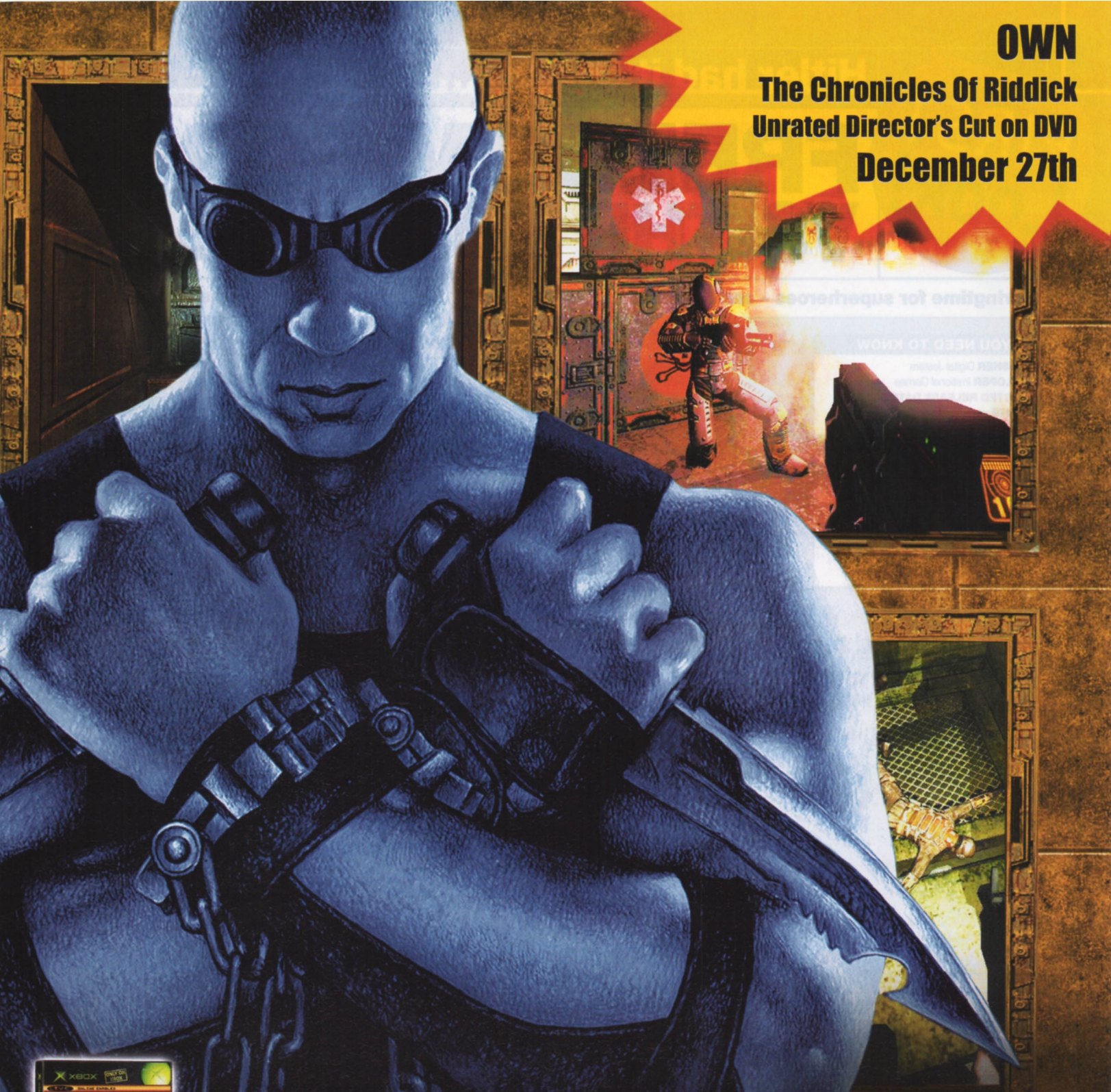
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OWN

The Chronicles Of Riddick
Unrated Director's Cut on DVD
December 27th



You are Riddick, the most wanted man in the universe, in an original story set before the events in Universal Pictures' *The Chronicles of Riddick* (starring Vin Diesel), and the breakout hit *Pitch Black*, which first introduced the enigmatic anti-hero Riddick. Make a dramatic escape from Butcher Bay, the galaxy's deadliest prison, in this intense fusion of first-person shooter, fighter, and stealth adventure.

THE CHRONICLES OF **RIDDICK**

ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

www.riddickgame.com

Available on DVD
December 27th

Hitler had it coming...

FIRST
Look!

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE THIRD REICH

Springtime for superheroes – and Germany...

■ RESTORER OF JUSTICE Will Porter

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Digital Jesters
DEVELOPER Irrational Games
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE April 2005
WEBSITE www.freedomforcegame.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the return of the PC's favourite evil-thwarting team
- Far more polished and complete than the last game
- New narrative-based multiplayer modes
- All-new engine, graphical tweaks and goodness
- You fight the Third Reich

"The developer has all the time it wants to give this project the care it deserves"



As good as Casablanca?



The gang visit sunny Cuba.

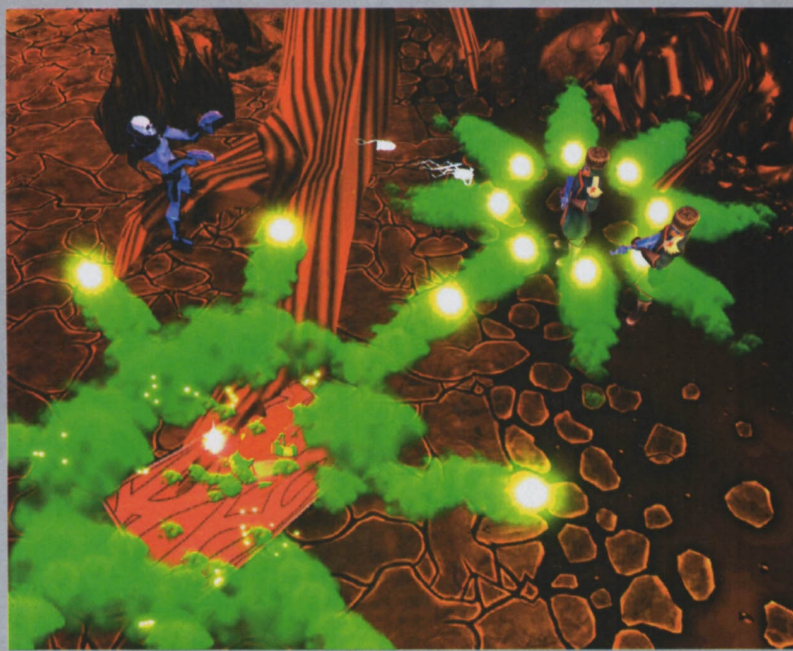
"STOP MUCKING about!"

cries Black Jack the stiff upper-lipped Brit scientist-cum-gadgeteer while he readies a Limey Lure or a Biff For Blighty. "I am being assaulted by a relentless foe!" shouts another of your heroic party as the Nazis advance. Welcome back to *Freedom Force*, the superhero game that likes to do things slightly differently.

A tale of silver-age 1960s comic book heroes getting up to all manner of derring-do, *Freedom Force*'s novel take on the action/RPG was warmly received – yet also rushed out the door unpolished by its then publisher EA. Now though, the developer has all the time it wants to give its pet project the care and attention it deserves – and it's put Nazis and brains in tanks in it as well.

It all kicks off a year after the first game. Hoodlum activity is low, and the nefarious plotting of criminal masterminds seems to have abated. After an introductory playable premonition in which Alchemiss (who remains guilty about leaving Manbot in the Celestial Clock – long story) dreams about the *Freedom Force* turning on her, the action begins. The deputy director of the CIA wants the gang to check out Castro's Cuba, where the evil Nuclear Winter has used TimeMaster's slumbering body to magic 1962's Cuban Missiles (of Crisis fame) to the present (1963) where he can be diabolical with them.

Freedom Force, obviously, saves the day. But when our heroes return to fair Patriot City, they discover that it's now become



New heroine Green Genie transforms her foes...

Port Blitzkrieg, and has been repopulated by jackbooted, goose-stepping Nazis.

So it is then (time stream meddlers take note) that the Force must travel back in time to WWII and prepare to thwart badness once more. Teaming up with Tricolour (foxy French patriot), Sky King (brash actor and rocketeer) and the superbly stereotypical British card-chucker Black Jack, it's your mission to battle through the Nazi ranks and defeat the enormously brained Blitzkrieg.

Multiplayer is also getting a revamp (because, let's face it, it was pretty shitty the first time round), with endless customisation options to satiate the rabid *Freedom Force* community, as well as story-based missions to give your online heroics a bit of direction.

In short, there's oodles of love being put into this sequel (as demonstrated by the fact that many of the bombastic superhero voices are recorded by the developers and artists themselves), and it's hard to see how anyone could dislike its silliness or the bright-eyed honour-preserving naivety of its heroic combatants. For freedom! [EW]



Tombstone: hero and vengeful incarnation of a condemned man.

"I destroy this fruit stall in the name of liberty, truth and justice!"



The Giant Snakes of WWII have never been touched upon. Until now...

THE EYES HAVE IT

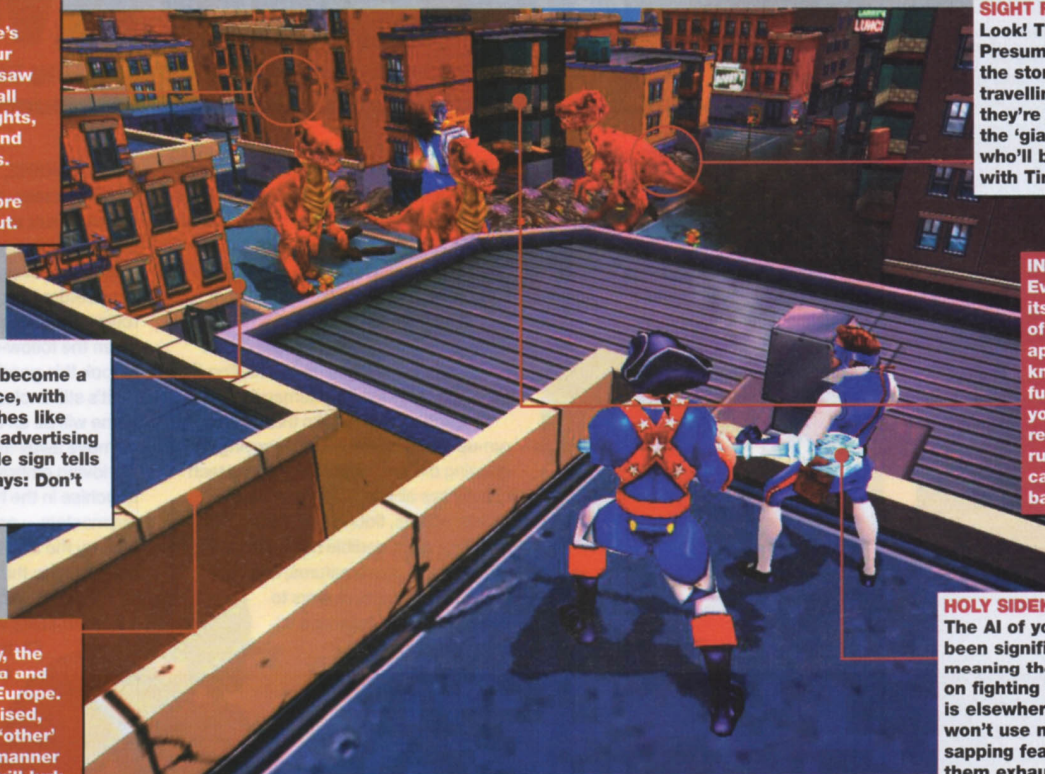
The detail in the game's textures is roughly four times that which you saw last time round, with all manner of dynamic lights, frame buffer effects and far less boxy buildings. It should make the environments a lot more spectacular throughout.

PATRIOT GAME

Patriot City itself has become a far more dynamic place, with some really nice touches like superhero-sponsored advertising hoardings. One notable sign tells children: "El Diablo says: Don't play with fire!"

HEROIC HOTSPOTS

As well as Patriot City, the game spans '60s Cuba and (obviously) occupied Europe. A few fights are promised, however, in a bizarre 'other' dimension where all manner of maniacal mystery will lurk.



SIGHT FOR SAURIAN EYES

Look! There are dinosaurs! Presumably churned into the storyline by all the time-travelling shenanigans, they're just one example of the 'giant' beasts/heroes who'll be in the game along with TimeMaster et al.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Every building will have its own custom pile of rubble (and will apparently be easier to knock over), so you can fully expect the damage you deliver to be reciprocated in the ruins around you. You can also now see into bashed-about houses.

HOLY SIDEKICKS!

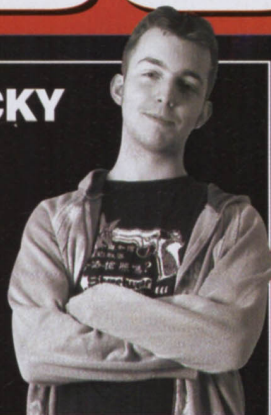
The AI of your team has also been significantly tweaked, meaning they'll happily carry on fighting when your attention is elsewhere, although they won't use massively power-sapping feats that'll leave them exhausted and vulnerable.



ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN

MUCKY PUP



■ NEWS WRITER Will Porter

▲ Have you ever looked inside your keyboard? I hadn't until last week, and so was mildly surprised that when I dislodged my 'w' key to find out why it was sticking so much there was an entire micro-civilization staring back at me. Formed from bits of hair, Kit-Kat, Wotsit powder and a tiny puddle of black coffee, the society was so advanced that it had a rudimentary religious structure and had already mastered crop rotation and a market-place economy. In short, the inside of my keyboard was minging.

For the love of God people, if you eat over your keyboard never look underneath it – not even if you suspect there's a large quantity of gold bullion in there. If you suspect there's a substantial detritus build-up lying within then simply throw the keyboard away; no one should have to go through what I've been through. No one should be forced to see the bastard offspring of a Lion bar and a Cheesy Quaver bathing in the grime of broken skin cells. It's just too hideous. Leave it well alone.

Leaving this episode behind us however, we reach a Bulletin somewhat truncated by a colossal Previews section and your own correspondent's inherent Yuletide laziness. Nevertheless, there are some gems in here should you care to peruse my wares – not least the presence of Weebl and the future of the *Far Cry* engine. Two regulars are also conspicuous by their absence, that much I know, but rest assured that Indie Zone is quite snug in its new position in the Reviews section while the wheels are in motion to raise something wonderful, beautiful and magnificent from the embers of Emu Zone. It's called Freeplay, and it'll be here next month. So see you next time.



Arguably the blandest *Far Cry* monster gets a next-gen revamp to amaze one and all.



FAR AND AWAY

Crytek drops jaws with *The Project* – a stunning machinima exposé of the technology that will power the successor to *Far Cry*



Ah... Our favourite rocket launcher.

TO SHOW just how cinematic its next opus is set to be, Crytek, the marvellous developer behind *Far Cry*, has released a short film that plays out on your machine through the increasingly impressive CryENGINE. We've got it exclusively on this month's DVD – alongside a basic movie of the demo should your rig not be up to meeting *The Project*'s hefty system demands.

Essentially a short film that covers the run-up to the catamaran-destroying opening of *Far Cry*, the machinima tech demo uses all manner of new water shader effects, fiddles with focal distance, an incredible new refracted light effect for invisible creatures, and tools that allow developers to adjust colour, gamma and saturation with ease.

Developed alongside bods at ATI, *The Project* is also aimed at Hollywood. The idea is that, with the cinematic tools of

the CryENGINE, 'living storyboards' could be created to guide the development and direction of future movies. With such a system Crytek claims that everything can be crafted long before the actual cameras start rolling. But, quite frankly, who cares when the follow-up to *Far Cry* is going to look this good?

It's still unclear whether Crytek's next game will be an official *Far Cry* sequel; its move away from Ubisoft and into the loving embrace of EA has left the franchise in the hands of its former paymasters – perhaps demonstrated here by the fact that Jack Carver and Val are known in this film as Chuck and Lisa.

Nevertheless, whatever Crytek announces will have us reeling.

Check out the machinima on our discs for confirmation of its greatness.

Remember, none of it's pre-rendered – it's all engine, and all good.





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Game geeks dressing funny



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PC up for grabs. With bullets



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Oswald. Where are you now?



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Gets us all of a tingle every month

BEHOLD THE PIE

WOBLI AND BOB (OR WEEBL AND BOB) HIT THE BIG TIME WITH DVD AND ZONE COMPO

THIS ISN'T a huge amount to do with games, but if you've ever moved within a few metres of an Internet connection, then you should by default have seen *The Everyday Happenings Of Weebl, And Sometimes Weebl's friend Bob*. Known as Wobbl and Bob away from the Net for bizarre legal reasons, it's produced by a chap known as Weebl who also created the *Badger Badger Badger* toon and the marvellous *Kenya* song. These charming adventures of a kind-hearted rocking egg and his pursuit of donkey and pie have essentially finally given the Internet a sense of meaning and purpose. And a lot more pie.

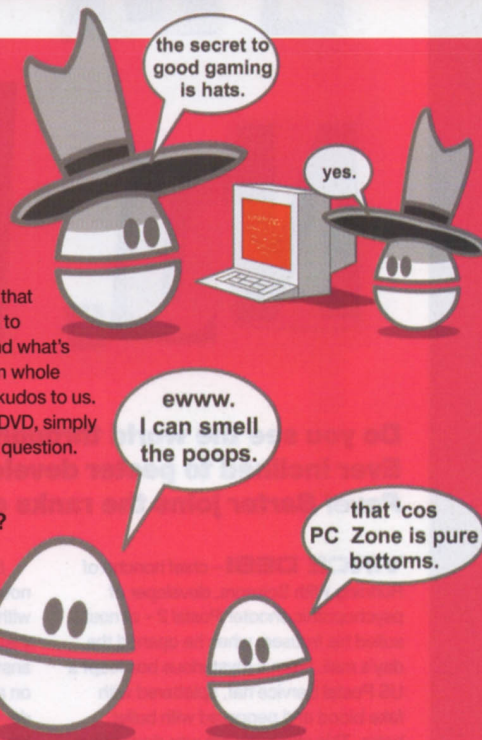
What's more is that Weebl/Wobbl and Bob have got a DVD coming out with over an hour of pure oddness for your delectation. What's doubly more is that there's a documentary narrated by none other than *PC ZONE* hero

Brian Blessed. What's triply more is that we've got an unseen toon designed to entice you on this month's discs. And what's quadruply more is that we've got ten whole DVDs to give away! So hoorah and kudos to us. To be in with a chance of winning a DVD, simply answer the following Weebl-centric question.

Which of the following is Weebl/Wobbl's arch-nemesis?

- A. Wee Bull
- B. Hairy Lee
- C. Donkey

Send entries to: I Love Pie, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. The closing date is February 2, so get scribbling.



ROUND-UP

HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFO INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN

Woof-ety Woof



TOGA TOGA TOGA

The first *Sims 2* expansion has been announced, and it's based in the wonderful world of the American College. *The Sims 2: University* will feature dorms, frat-houses, sororities, courses that your teen-sims can pass or fail and tons of parties (including the strange toga parties made famous by *Animal House*). Whether the pack will also feature traffic-cone stealing, cider and black and being sick through your nostrils has not been revealed.



ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

Looks like a sequel to *In Memoriam* is happening. Fans of the email/puzzle serial killer hunt, have been sent an email from the mysterious Phoenix saying, "Hello darling. A new masterpiece is in the works. You'll soon hear about me. To ease your wait I've put an extract on my site, just for you. See you soon, darling," before giving the web address www.xineph.com/9782911383182. What's going on?



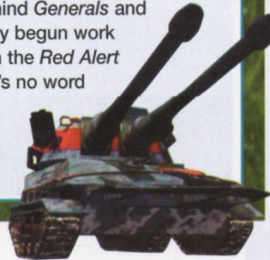
RAINBOW FLYING HIGH

No PC screens as yet (the one you see here is an Xbox offering), but we can confirm that Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* is well on its way. Offering the ability to play as either squad leader Ding Chavez or sneaky sniper Dieter Weber and a fair few multiplayer hooks, we're promised a darker and more personal tale of shootery and intrigue as the Six attempt to rescue one of their own from the clutches of evil-doers.



BETTER RED THAN DEAD

Red Alert 3 exists. That's the news from ex-Westwood and now EA bod Mark Skaggs, the author of a mail sent out to old-skool C&C fans. It stated that the team behind *Generals* and *Red Alert 2* have officially begun work on a new game based in the *Red Alert* universe, although there's no word on when we'll find out anything more concrete. As soon as we do, you'll be the first to know.



Good Cop. Bad Cop.

GOOD COP

PC ZONE scooping the world on the new *Star Wars* RTS. It's turning into a bit of a habit now...

The return of the wheato. A wheat beer-fuelled Supertest resulting in videotaped hair stroking, a news writer lost in London in the wee small hours and a lot of trouble when we failed to turn up the next morning.

Christmas proving that there is such a thing as a free lunch. Two at the last count.



BAD COP

A two-week issue severely hampering our festive-ness and good cheer.

Deputy art editor Jamie getting a recurring shoulder pain after drunkenly arm-wrestling Amazon women.

Three Nintendo DS handhelds temporarily making us consider turning *PC ZONE* into some bastard console magazine. Until we regained our senses.



Good Cop: **Officer Jack Traven** (Keanu Reeves)

Bad Cop: **Howard Payne** (Dennis Hopper) from *Speed* - the 1994 action classic that isn't quite as good as you thought it was at the time.

I'M YOUR No. 1 Fan!



**Do you see the world through a pixellated haze?
Ever inclined to pester developers with scary gifts?
Pavel Barter joins the ranks of the PC game nutter...**

VINCE DESI – chief honcho of Running With Scissors, developer of psychopathic shooter *Postal 2* – almost soiled his trousers when he opened the day's mail. From a mysterious box leapt a US Postal Service hat, splattered with fake blood and peppered with bullet holes. This charming gift was rigged to a spring device ensuring a Jack-In-The-Box surprise when opened. "That was insane," recalls Vince. "To this day I still don't know if it was from a fan or if it was hate-mail..."

For most of us, gaming is an addiction we can handle, even if it means crawling away from our PCs at 6am drenched in coffee stains and dribble. There are other important pursuits in life like strolls in the countryside, meeting the in-laws, golf, um... OK, maybe there aren't more important things in life, but here's my point: some keyboard-ticklers take their gaming a little too seriously. Symptoms include crazed eye-twitches, strafing across the living-room floor, removing light bulbs in order to hide in the shadows and sending developers scary presents.

Forget Britney Spears and Brad Pitt. Celebrity pop tarts and actors are granted nowhere near the level of devotion of a *Far Cry* or a *Half-Life 2*. "When was the last time you spent 40 hours in a week on your obsession with a particular celebrity? 'If you have an answer, probably best to keep it to yourself'," says author DB Weiss.

Lucky Wonder Boy, Weiss's debut novel, tells the story of one man's fixation with a game he played as a kid. Convinced that this missing game contains the answers to all his problems, he sets out on an adventure to track it down. A devoted gamer himself, the writer didn't have to look too hard for inspiration. "I know a guy who ended up getting diagnosed with vitamin D deficiency and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome in the same week. He went out and bought the new *Mortal Kombat* that weekend."

MARKED LOVE

Quake's hardcore followers, meanwhile, are more likely to express their devotion to the game in indelible ink. id Software's Todd Hollenshead recalls a guy visiting his office with a *Quake II* logo stretching from his ankle to his knee: "We were like, holy crap, that's a big tattoo!" At E3, he met another with *Quake II*'s invulnerability item tattooed from shoulder blade to shoulder blade on his back. One year at QuakeCon, a girl turned up with all three *Quake* logos interlocked at the back of her neck. This started a slight obsession on Todd's part, and his collection of id tattoo photos has now reached an impressive total of 43.

This pursuit of id-related body art was



"Gordon, there's something different about you..."

ramped up another level when Todd was pointed in the direction of a girl with a huge *Quake III* tattoo on a German website about women who drive high performance cars into muddy fields and/or snowdrifts. Carstuckgirls.com has since become an office favourite at both id and PC ZONE, and we can all confirm that Tina (the *Quake* fan in question) is pretty proficient at mud-wrestling. For true fan filth, though, *Postal*'s Vince Desi is your man. "One day I got an email from a fan and he asked if I would like to see a photo of his girlfriend, so I said sure. Next thing I knew I was on the phone with her getting invited to a threesome. This job can be dangerous sometimes."

Vince also sent us pictures of his

female admirer with a battery-operated *Postal* device, in the process shattering your correspondent's fragile eggshell of innocence. Aside from perverts, many *Postal* fans "are cops, in the military, or just good old gun-owning Americans," says Vince. "A while back we put a video-clip on our website of us at the shooting range. After that we had a shitload of fans wanting us to go hunting with them. I really think a lot of our fans identify with us and share similar values." Scary prospect.

The prime generator of obsessive gamers though is *EverQuest*, nicknamed 'EverCrack' and downfall of many a career and marriage. In fact, some angry wives and girlfriends have gone public in accusing *EverQuest* of stealing their men.



Healthy fandom? Or outlet for sexual peccadillos...



Whatever will the grandchildren say?



DRESSED TO KILL

THE ULTIMATE FAN'S GUIDE TO CREATING A GORDON FREEMAN COSTUME IN 10 EASY STEPS (GENEROUS WAISTLINES WELCOME)



Members of online forum 'EverQuest Widows' share tales of woe and offer encouragement and company. One post describes how a husband insisted on playing the game in the delivery room while his wife gave birth. "My husband told me about this group today, after we had a fight," writes another member, to which the forum answers: "You need to

hang tight, that they were still bringing people into Beta and that he would, undoubtedly, be one of the chosen few. Then I jumped in my car and pulled out of the lot as fast as I could."

For a more colourful way of expressing devotion to your favourite game, there's always Cosplay: fancy dress for animé, manga and videogame fans. NCsoft

"Next thing I knew I was on the phone with her getting invited to a threesome"

simply leave your husband cold turkey. Walk and never look back. He'll eventually come crawling back, but shut him down and don't listen to his pathetic excuses – even if he cancels his EQ account."

GET YOUR FREAK ON

EverQuest mania preceded the game's release, says Sony Online's Chris Kramer. In 1998, he was leaving the SOE offices and as he walked toward his car another vehicle sped up alongside. "A woman rolled down the driver's side window and said, 'Excuse me, I see you're carrying an EverQuest poster. Do you work here?' Visions of the end of *Talk Radio* [Oliver Stone's movie about a DJ's assassination] dancing in my head, I said no. She persisted though: 'Well, we drove an hour to get here, and we need to talk to someone at the company because my husband here,' she pointed to a quiet guy in the front seat, 'wants to get into the Beta and he hasn't received his CD yet.' I told her that it would probably be best to

recently ran a Halloween costume contest for *City Of Heroes*, and you can see some of the loving recreations bedecking these pages. Elsewhere, an EA worker called Bret DeCelle created a Gordon Freeman suit for a Halloween party in California. Walking through the streets he was greeted with shouts of "Gordon!" and "Half-Life!" Armed with a crowbar, Bret's headcrab count was low that day.

Fans like Bret can be hardcore about their passion without going all helter-skelter on us, but we all know one or two gamers that remain a little too precious about gaming. Ken Levine of Irrational Games recently walked into a game shop in San Francisco to see if they carried *Tribes: Vengeance*, which had just been released. "Yes, we have it," replied the shop dweeb. "I keep it behind the counter because I don't want just anyone to play it." The moral of this story is that only the worthy can join the *Tribes* community, and only the worryingly obsessed can earn the status of Number One Fan. [PZ]



CAN YOU FEEL IT?

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HUGE HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 GIVEAWAY!

WORTH
OVER
£1,500!

Banish the beige! Thanks to the creative souls at Bit-tech and Take 2 Interactive, we're giving away an exclusive Ammo-Box PC, guaranteed to put some bang back into your gaming...



FIRST PRIZE

- Bit-tech 'Ammo-Box' PC
- H&D2 Chronograph
- *Hidden & Dangerous 2* and *Sabre Squadron* expansion pack
- H&D2 Merchandise

RUNNERS-UP PRIZES

Nine lucky runners-up will get their hands on:

- A H&D2 Chronograph
- A copy of *Hidden & Dangerous 2* and *Sabre Squadron* expansion pack
- H&D2 Merchandise

YOU MAY BE the finest virtual soldier ever to strap on a tin helmet and march into war. You may have lain waste to half the Wehrmacht in your quests to liberate Europe from the Nazi hordes. You may be able to single-handedly take on Hitler, Goebbels and mecha-Himmler with nothing more than a blunt butter knife and a mountain of grit. But when you glance away from the screen and stare at the bland plastic moulding housing the raw power of your computational power, all your endeavours seem somehow lessened, wouldn't you say?

Not anymore! The genius PC modders over at Bit-tech have put together a very special piece of hardware to help celebrate the release of the *Hidden & Dangerous 2* expansion pack, *Sabre Squadron*, from Take 2 Interactive.

These explosive Ammo-Box PCs have been custom-built by the hardware gurus over at www.bit-tech.net, the UK's leading PC enthusiast website. Using the finest hardware packed into a small and stylish package, the boxes are perfect for LAN gaming and will make an awesome addition to any gaming set-up! The hardware includes 1GB of ultra-speedy Corsair DDR400 memory, a huge 250GB Western Digital hard drive, as well as a Creative Audigy 2 ZS for the ultimate surround-sound experience. The systems are built around an AMD64 platform for the ultimate in gaming performance. Believe us when we tell you that these boxes will blow you away!

Win, and you also get a copy of the *Sabre Squadron* expansion pack, along with the original *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, an exclusive H&D2 Chronograph (or 'watch', to you and me), plus exclusive H&D2 merchandise. Nine runners-up get everything except the PC. [E]

THE RULES

To be in with a chance of winning the prizes, simply answer the following question and post your entry to the address below no later than Wednesday February 2, 2005. For the full terms and conditions, see page 7.

Q. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS SET IN WWII?

a. M*A*S*H* b. Dad's Army c. Tour Of Duty

Write your answer (a, b or c) on a postcard with your name, address and contact phone number and send it to: Sabre Squadron Competition, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.



WARNING!

Although designed for portability, bear in mind that the bullets and casing are very realistic. PC ZONE cannot accept any responsibility for how police forces and airport security may react.



FAKE BULLETS!



STENCIL WRITING!



A BIG HINGE!



A COOL HANDLE!



I BELIEVE
I CAN
FLY

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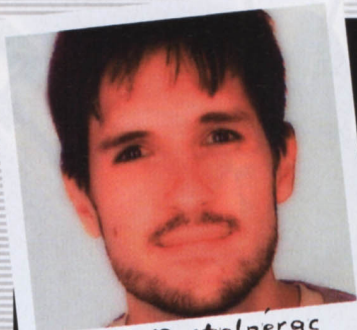
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Florent Castelnerac
Director of development at Nadeo -
home of TrackMania

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Sherlock Holmes: The Case Of The Silver Earring, Civilization III, Quake III and TrackMania. I am always trying to find original games online as well.

What was the last videogame you finished playing?

I finished an adventure game called *Runaway* some weeks ago. Otherwise, I generally play games like *Civ*, *Quake* and *TrackMania* that you can't really finish.

What is your favourite game of all time?

I don't have a favourite, although the games I've played the most are the first episodes of *Castlevania*, *Leisure Suit Larry*, *Civ*, *Stunt Car Racer*, *Lemmings*, *Gradius*, *Quake*...

What are you most proud of in your career?

To have found and convinced really positive people to follow me. It was lucky, but I worked really hard to succeed.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

All the developers that work hard - I admire anyone that gets their job done perfectly.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

The PC enables gamers to play and create with people from all around the world. First off we had the arcade, with one game for one machine and two players. Then we had the console for lots of games and four players. Now we've got the PC for Internet, music, software and for more players than you can count!

What is your company's philosophy?

We often say the secret of making things is just to start making them. Six years ago, I put in the time and work to start a team and a development platform. Since year one, all this work has proved itself worthwhile.

What's the best thing about your job?

To work with cool people and to see people create and share around the world.

What's the worst thing about your job?

The time it takes to finish games and get to be known by people. A game should be made in three months and known in three months if it's really worth it.

What are you working on at the moment?

We are working on *TrackMania Sunrise*. Although in addition the team is also working on the original *TrackMania* to bring new blocks and features to the community.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

To play, create and share with everybody. And *TrackMania*!



The many ages of *Civilization* - now coming in for a welcome revamp.

Civvie Street

SID MEIER SET TO REWORK CIV FROM THE GROUND UP FOR ITS FOURTH OUTING

CIVILIZATION, the great-granddaddy of the strategy genre, is going to get a new instalment in 2005. In itself this isn't surprising - it's a warhorse that'll presumably continue bathing its publishers in money forever - but this time round we really could be in for a treat.

For a start development is being headed up by Meier himself, who was absent from the position of Top Cat on *Civilization III*. What's more, every element of gameplay in *Civ IV* is being reworked from scratch, not (as before)

being built on top of pre-existing gameplay structures that have existed in some form since the game's genesis back in 1991. At every level nuggets of gameplay are being scrutinised and tweaked in a way that hasn't been done in years - the results of which could prove gripping.

So what'll come out of this? Well no more plucky bands of horsemen defeating tank regiments for one, and (as can be expected these days) a lot of the more fiddly urban micro-management

has been streamlined for user comfort. New features, meanwhile, include World Religion (so we'd imagine the Pope will be sticking his oar in from time to time) and Great People who you'll be proud to call a part of your Empire.

Civilization has always been a game mocked by fools who've never played it, but with a glorious and smooth scrolling 3D engine, and a multiplayer contingent with games that you can choose to last a few hours or a few months, it's looking increasingly like *Civ* addicts will have a whole raft of extra reasons to get angry with those troublesome Aztecs.

Publisher: Take-Two
Developer: Firaxis
ETA: 2005
Website: www.firaxis.com

DO NOT PASS GO

WIN! GO STRAIGHT TO PRISON WHEN YOU WIN COPIES OF THE *CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY!*



The best movie licence adaptation since *GoldenEye*.

THE MOVIE version of *Chronicles of Riddick* wasn't great. In fact, it matched up with many other rubbish things with 'Chronicles' in the title - *Tomb Raider: Chronicles*, *Chronicles Of Namia*, and that dull bit about King Solomon in the Old Testament to name but a few. Glory be, then, that *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* bucked the trend.

It may have started off life in the confines of an Xbox, but we found that its brutal, sci-fi action is just as relevant when played out through a PC and awarded it a hefty 86 per cent last issue. Short-lived it may be, but it's a game that never stops surprising you with its heady mix of gameplay styles

and the way it makes its futuristic prison environments entirely believable and entirely horrible.

We've snuck ten copies of the game out of VU Games HQ to offer them as prizes to the *PC ZONE* readership. So to experience the best prison experience this side of Ronnie Barker and *Porridge*, all you have to do is answer the following question.

What is the name of the special powers that Riddick uses to see in the dark?

A: Furyan
B: Muryan
C: Carrot Eating

Send your entries on a postcard or the back of an envelope to: *Chronicles Of Riddick* Compo, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Make sure you get your entries in before February 2 2005, or we may well burn your entry and laugh at your ineptitude.



HOME AND AWAY



Nobody mention Pro Evo...

EA TRIES TO RECLAIM FOOTBALL HIERARCHY WITH UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2004-2005

IT'S NOT AS though the Champions League is lacking in drama as it is, nonetheless EA has decided that what Europe's leading football tournament needs to really catch the attention is a story. Specifically, *UEFA Champions League 2004-2005* tasks you not only with guiding the team of your choice (Premiership and Euro-equivalents only, naturally) to footballing glory, but also sees you having to deal with the kind of owner interference that makes managing Southampton look like a walk in the park.

The Story mode gives you a total of 50 scenarios to work through, from qualifying for the tournament in the first place, to buying and selling specific players on the transfer market, to satisfying the whims of your new owner by beating each team by three clear goals – one of which must be headed, while running backwards whistling a happy tune. Or something.

The usual high-end *FIFA* presentation is on show, now with added chavs in the shape of TalkSPORT radio presenters

commenting on your performance mid-game. Set pieces have been streamlined following complaints about the point-and-click adventure style of the last *FIFA* outing, and refs are now prone to more realistic (ie wrong) penalty and offside decisions.

You also get to create your manager, literally, in the shape of the customisation screens – adjusting everything from clothing to the shape of his head. He'll then show up mid-game in the snazzy TV-style picture-in-picture camera replays, expressing frustration, despair and, occasionally if you play as Arsenal, elation at your actions. Expect it to sell by the bucketload. Don't expect us to pull any punches if it matches up to the last lacklustre EA football offering though...

■ **Publisher:** EA Sports
■ **Developer:** EA Sports
■ **ETA:** Spring
■ **Website:** www.ea.com



'Back of the net!', as Alan Partridge might say.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

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SICK SHOOTER *Postal 2* has been banned by the moral guardians of New Zealand. Following a year-long investigation into the game, in which players can urinate into the face of a prostitute, the Office of Film and Literature Classification has deemed it illegal to own or sell the title, with offenders facing fines or even prison. Anybody found with a copy of the game faces a fine of NZ\$2,000, the equivalent of exactly £742.86. Retailers selling or even displaying the game face a fine of NZ\$20,000 (that's more than seven grand) and could potentially be jailed for a year, shitting into a bucket and trading cigarettes for favours. Furthermore, any larger 'incorporated' distributors or retailers can be fined NZ\$50,000 (so much money it's not real) for similar breaches. The OFLC judged: "The game is designed, and has the capacity, to allow the player to test how much violence and humiliation he or she can inflict on human beings." In response, developer **Running With Scissors** founder **Vince Desi** lashed out at a specific New Zealand resident, bleating: "I'm glad that **Peter Jackson** can hack and slash up orcs, elves and pseudo-humans in *The Lord Of The Rings*, but a videogame like *Postal*, that lets you piss on yourself, is somehow evil."

Meanwhile, the inaugural **Day of Non-Violent Games** passed without incident in California. The brainchild of children's games company **CMY Multimedia**, in association with the **Boys and Girls Club of Irvine**, the event involved a day of games that were non-violent. **Gretchen Long**, branch director for the Boys and Girls Club, laughed: "This event is for having fun and for parents and children to enjoy themselves while playing together." Meanwhile, **Antonio Romero**, director of business development for CMY Multimedia in the United States, frowned: "We feel that there are many individuals and organisations in America that share our belief of enjoyable entertainment without belligerence. We also believe that the violence in videogames is a worldwide issue, where brutality is presented to children as the ultimate rush." Bleedin' hippies.

"Why is a videogame like *Postal 2*, that lets you piss on yourself, somehow considered evil?"



The PC enters tabloid town for the fifth time this month...

KILL THE PRESIDENT

JFK RELOADED: INTERACTIVE HISTORY OR SHAMELESS CASH-IN?

DESCRIBED AS "despicable" by Senator Edward Kennedy, a downloadable game that re-enacts the JFK assassination is predictably causing a media storm. Developed by Stirling-based Traffic Games, *JFK Reloaded* puts you in the shoes of Lee Harvey Oswald on top of the Dallas Book Depository, rifle in hand, as the motorcade looms into view on the fateful day of November 22 1963 – all for the price of \$9.99. Replicate Oswald's actions accurately, and you could even win a cash prize – with over \$10,000 dollars in the pot at the time of writing.

Naturally, the game has caused offence – not least to the Kennedy family – but the debate surrounds the medium rather than the content. After all, you can watch actual footage of the assassination, read about it extensively, visit the museum in Dallas and even stand on the

painted cross on the road where Kennedy's head famously exploded. And of course, there's the award-winning JFK film, which is widely hailed as a masterpiece.

As Traffic MD Kirk Ewing says: "It does seem hypocritical to us that because we used videogame technology to recreate the assassination, then we're somehow undermining the event. I personally find Oliver Stone's movie more controversial because he uses film to create conspiracy and distort history for what, I assume, is his own and the studio's financial gain. It's another example of people assuming that somehow by being a game, it's a lesser medium, whereas as we all know, videogames are an engaging and immersive way to experience things."

This would appear to be backed up by the consumer response, with

Ewing claiming: "It's been a phenomenon, and people are coming back for more and more. We've just put the high-score table up, and at the moment the highest score is 748. That guy is set to win the highest prize ever in videogames history. The most amazing thing has been the level of debate about what we've done. People that have actually used it have written to us amazed at the depth of *JFKR*. Some people have assumed that the experience would be too short-lived. I don't think they realised that you could play with it so much, but the truth is once you've seen it, you go back to it again and again to try out the different options. Because of the level of technology involved, specifically the ballistics and ragdoll physics we've used, the experience is incredibly rich and detailed."

With front-page splashes in the broadsheets, and the incandescent explosion of the American media, we can only assume that this piece of controversy is set to be a lucrative one. The game itself is a fun one, all 30 seconds of it, but we can also report that every shot tends to come with a feeling of being pretty disappointed in yourself. Entertainment, outrage, money-spinner, or all three? The lines get even blurrier...



JFK's brain being exposed adds even more fuel to the debate.

■ **Publisher:** Traffic Games
 ■ **Developer:** Traffic Games
 ■ **ETA:** Out now
 ■ **Website:** www.jfkreloaded.com



"You wouldn't let your child watch The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. You wouldn't let them go to a strip club. So you shouldn't let them play an 18-rated videogame. It's the same principle."

You see? We've been saying this for ages, and now someone dead important like Tessa Jowell agrees.

"This gamer is bruteler than Lethal Weapon 2, when wepens get shot out of buss, and bombs got off. Crnk up the shaf for power! If people knew the story behine the filmy, they wuld wear bandags for protect against villins like joke and black cat, and even the james bund bd guie"

A customer review of Half-Life 2 on the Special Reserve website. We don't get it, although we do like Lethal Weapon 2.



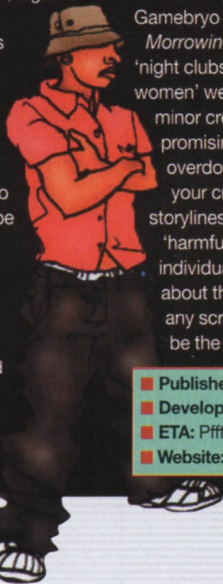
DEALER
FURIOUS DRUG & COKE

SORTED FOR ES AND WHIZZ?

EASTERN EUROPE OFFERS UP YET ANOTHER DAILY MAIL-BAITING BEAUTY

EVERY NOW and then you come across a game that you just know is never going to happen, but you just feel a need to tell everyone about it anyway. *Dealer: Chronic, Pills & Coke*, a game not so much on the GTA bandwagon as tangled in its wheels and hanging on for grim death, has been announced by Hungarian outfit Nagual Games.

Promising four playable characters (each addicted to their own chosen poison – be it coke, speed or hash) the game will allow you to buy drug labs, marijuana plantations and warehouses in the now traditional third-person 'bad man shooting' style. The drugs available should include weed, mushrooms, LSD, speed,



ecstasy, alcohol, crack, cocaine and heroin, and you'll be dealing in this vast medicine cabinet everywhere from back alleys to high-class parties.

It's being developed on the Gamebryo engine (as used by *Morrowind*) and despite its promises of 'night clubs, junkie prostitutes and sexy women' we're not entirely sold. To its minor credit, the developers are promising death for those who take overdoses, side-effects that hamper your criminal activities and storylines that show how drugs are 'harmful to the society and the individual.' We won't hear a sniff about this for a fair while, but should any screenshots ever appear, you'll be the first to know.

■ Publisher: TBA
■ Developer: Nagual Games
■ ETA: Pfft!
■ Website: www.dealer-game.com

WE CAN BE HEROES

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CRYPTIC STUDIOS

Search For a Game

Got the greatest game idea since *Pong*? Come and put it to the ultimate test – PC ZONE's Search For A Game...



Penultimate entry time! Yes, we're so close to the end of this marathon of gaming inspiration that we can taste it. After next month's final entry we'll be hosting a grand final in which the winners are put to the public vote for ultimate glorification. This month sees **Greg Hewitt** of Gwynedd, Wales, pitching his effort to the ever-fair judging panel. Greg even included some mocked-up screenshots, which we always like. So here we go with an idea that is...

"A bit like Tony Hawk's on water"

PLAYBOATER 2005

FOR THOSE who don't know, Playboating is a sport that involves trying to make a short kayak fly. At first it sounds crap, but once you get into it, it's brilliant fun!

Playboater 2005 would play a bit like *Tony Hawk's* on water.

Career mode will give you a choice of competitions to choose from every weekend. Getting good results will earn you money, which you can spend on better equipment or boats. You can even use it to enter bigger competitions or to go on a canoeing holiday.

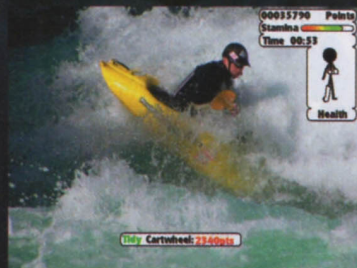
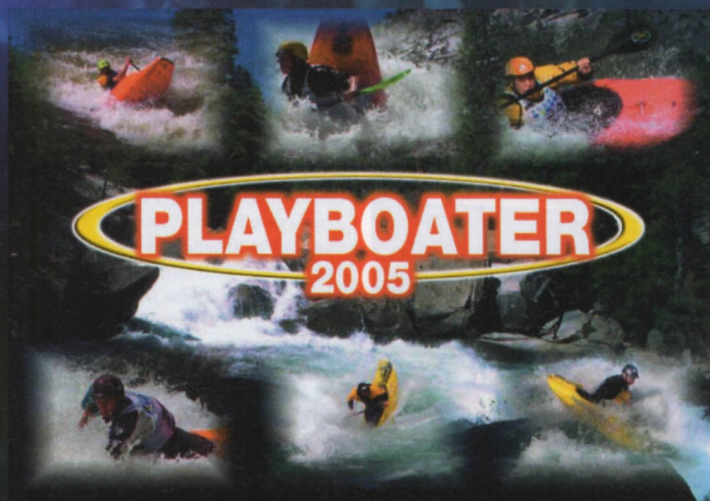
When you begin the career mode, you have a choice of paddling C1 (single paddle), or K1 (double paddle), as well as the option to edit your character's name, appearance and stats. As you practise, stats will increase or decrease depending on how good your paddling is.

Stamina is affected by how aggressively you've been paddling, and for how long. Health is shown by a little animated stick figure in the corner of the screen. If a character breaks a bone, he gets taken to hospital and has

to build his strength and stamina up again. If your character gets knocked out, you get to see his/her ragdoll body float downstream, followed by a group of rescuers.

A river editor would be included, where you plot out a map of a river, add rocks, shoots and waterfalls, then you let the physics engine figure out how the water behaves. There would even be an online career mode to play after the player has become champion, which would add to the longevity of the game. You've got to love it!

At least the splashscreen (geddit?) looks nice.



Special moves earn points.



Different levels, from C1 to, er, K1.



Damage is indicated by an animated stick figure.

WHAT THE JUDGES SAY



Greg, you're about three years too late. Recently there was an avalanche of *Tony Hawk*-style games transposed to sports including snowboarding and cycling, but the games-buying public tired of the formula very quickly. Even the genre-defining *Tony Hawk's* franchise has gone 'underground' to deliver more entertaining, edgy gameplay. I suppose the boating idea could feature as a level in, say, a WWII shooter, where you have to negotiate a river with Nazis shooting from riverbanks. But in its present form, this damp squib should be given a wide berth. **Verdict: MISS!**

Playboater sounds to me like a gay porn mag, probably filled with pictures of young boys in sailor suits. Not a good start I think you'll agree, and from there it just gets worse. "Tony Hawk's on water"? What are you talking about man? How do you propose to make ramps and rails out of water? Or ledges, gutters, traffic, buildings or anything else with a shred of interest for that matter? This is not a game, it's a novelty event. As part of a bigger extreme sports package it might work, but even then I have my doubts.

Verdict: MISS!



Much as this sounds like fun, it does sound like you're taking your own hobby (which is, in fairness, a bit niche) and adapting it for videogame glory. Thing is, *Tony Hawk's* is popular because skateboarding is so completely a part of everyday life, and universally thought of as being at least slightly cool. If it were a near-identical game but about kayaking, windsurfing or space-hopping then it wouldn't sell. So yeah, you've got a good game on your hands – but only one to be sampled by a limited audience. Which sucks, but them's the breaks. **Verdict: MISS!**

"Ah well, you can't win them all. No matter, we're almost done with this rod for our backs... Er, concerted effort to find the game of the future. Next month is the last entry, so be sure not to miss it!"



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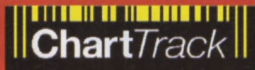
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TOP 10




Head of the retail charts is Gordon Freeman and his wonderful Eastern European adventure. It may hurt to know that Alyx is making goo-goo eyes at other people (the cheap hussy), but it's good to see a game of such quality at the top. If you have the Internet...



It's not really that much cop y'know... It's alright. But, that's about it. You couldn't find a more non-remarkable game if you tried. When the best thing you can say about a game is that it passes the time, you have to worry. Pearl Harbour's a blast though.

| | TITLE | PUBLISHER | SCORE |
|----|--|------------|-------|
| 1 | NEW HALF-LIFE 2 | VU GAMES | 97% |
| 2 | - THE SIMS 2 | EA | 82% |
| 3 | NEW FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 | SEGA | 90% |
| 4 | NEW MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT | EA | 79% |
| 5 | ▼ ROME: TOTAL WAR | ACTIVISION | 93% |
| 6 | NEW NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2 | EA | 84% |
| 7 | ▼ ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3 | ATARI | 79% |
| 8 | NEW VAMPIRE - BLOODLINES | ACTIVISION | 86% |
| 9 | NEW ZOO TYCOON 2 | MICROSOFT | 55% |
| 10 | NEW JOINT OPERATIONS: ESCALATION | NOVALOGIC | 85% |



Need For Speed: Underground 2, a game which is both bling and wicked, enters the charts at number six. Hooded youths and night-time residents of supermarket car-parks rejoice! It's a class game mind, and exhaust pipe-tastic.



We'd advise you to wait for the patch before delving into this ace roleplayer, else copious bugs will hamper your bloodsucking experience. Otherwise, we whole-heartedly recommend it; it's a smart, sassy RPG that will blow a hole in your social life with ease.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

I'm surprised *Medal Of Honor: Pathetic Attempt* has got to the heady heights of number four. I wasn't impressed with that game, can you tell?
Madameye

I'm surprised *HL2* has pipped *The Sims* nonsense. Quality beating mainstream pap? Whatever next?
Timbrom

Half-Life 2 on top and everything is right in the world. Except that *The Sims 2* is in second.
Geordie_boy89



TOP 10

| | |
|--|------------|
| 1. ZOO TYCOON 2 | MICROSOFT |
| 2. FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 | SEGA |
| 3. MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT | EA |
| 4. HALF-LIFE 2 | VU GAMES |
| 5. THE SIMS 2 | EA |
| 6. PIRATES! | ATARI |
| 7. VAMPIRE - BLOODLINES | ACTIVISION |
| 8. PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN | UBISOFT |
| 9. NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2 | EA |
| 10. PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4 | KONAMI |

COMPETITION



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- A** We're All Going To The Zoo Tomorrow
B We're All Going To The Zoo Next Week
C We Don't Go To Zoos. They're Outdated Institutions

Send your answers on a postcard to: **PC ZONE** Chart Compo Issue 151, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: February 2 2005

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to **PC ZONE**.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

JANUARY

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT | GLOBAL STAR |
| GTR | ATARI |
| IMPERIAL GLORY | EIDOS |
| SCRAPLAND | DEEP SILVER |

FEBRUARY

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30 | UBISOFT |
| CITY OF HEROES | NCSOFT |
| COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS | DEEP SILVER |
| IMMORTAL CITIES: CHILDREN OF THE NILE | SEGA |
| KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS | ACTIVISION |
| SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS | UBISOFT |
| THE PUNISHER | THQ |

MARCH

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| BATTLEFIELD 2 | EA |
| COLD FEAR | UBISOFT |
| DARWINIA | INTROVERSION SOFTWARE |
| PARIAH | HIP INTERACTIVE |
| PLAYBOY: THE MANSION | UBISOFT |
| PROJECT: SNOWBLIND | EIDOS |
| PSYCHOTOXIC | WHITTAIL |
| SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY | UBISOFT |
| STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO | ACTIVISION |
| STOLEN | HIP INTERACTIVE |

APRIL

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| FREEDOM FORCE VS. THE THIRD REICH | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| LEGO STAR WARS | EIDOS |
| STRONGHOLD 2 | GLOBAL STAR |
| TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE | DIGITAL JESTERS |

MAY

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| BET ON SOLDIER | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| HEART OF EMPIRE | DEEP SILVER |
| STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL | THQ |
| X2: THE RETURN | DEEP SILVER |

JUNE

| | |
|----------|----------|
| F.E.A.R. | VU GAMES |
|----------|----------|

Q1 2005

| | |
|--|----------|
| ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION | ATARI |
| BOILING POINT | ATARI |
| CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH | BETHESDA |
| CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5 | EIDOS |
| COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE | EIDOS |
| COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR | CDV |
| DRAGONSHARD | ATARI |
| EMPIRE EARTH II | VU GAMES |
| GHOST RECON 2 | UBISOFT |
| HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY | EIDOS |
| PSYCHONAUTS | TBA |
| THE MATRIX ONLINE | SEGA/WB |
| WORLD OF WARCRAFT | VU GAMES |

2005

| | |
|--|-------------|
| ADVENT RISING | VU GAMES |
| BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY | SCI |
| BIOSHOCK | TBA |
| BLACK & WHITE 2 | EA |
| DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY | FUNCOM |
| DUNGEON SIEGE II | MICROSOFT |
| ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION | BETHESDA |
| GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS | ROCKSTAR |
| KING KONG | UBISOFT |
| MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE | VU GAMES |
| QUAKE IV | ACTIVISION |
| STARSHIP TROOPERS | EMPIRE |
| SWAT 4 | VU GAMES |
| STUBBS THE ZOMBIE | ASPYR |
| THE MOVIES | ACTIVISION |
| THE WITCHER | TBA |
| WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45 | CODEMASTERS |
| YOU ARE EMPTY | 1C |

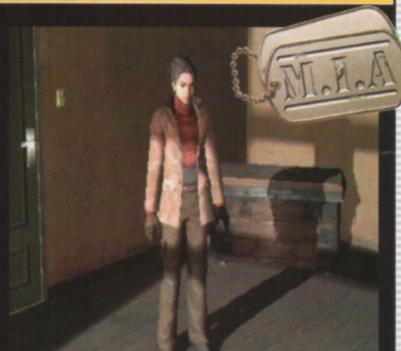
MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

FAHRENHEIT

This promising and extremely French tale of mass murder and cinematic trickery has had an unfortunate bout of the backstage shuffles. Having terminated its production and publishing agreement with VU Games, the bets are on for when this will surface.

- Publisher: TBA
- Developer: Quantic Dream
- ETA: MIA
- Website: www.quanticrodream.com



PIRATES OF THE BURNING SEA



It's a small team and a big project, so it's no wonder there's going to be a fair amount of being adrift before this pirate MMOG floats into beta. Originally slated for October, then Q4 2004, it's now got a tag of TBA. We wouldn't normally mind, but after *Pirates!* we've gained a taste for nautical misdeeds...

- Publisher: Flying Lab Software
- Developer: Flying Lab Software
- ETA: TBA
- Website: www.burningsea.com

JUICED

We may have reviewed it five issues ago, but after the tumble taken by Acclaim, *Juiced* still hasn't seen the light of day. Good news though: THQ has nabbed the game for its own 2005 portfolio. We're expecting a bling summer, so *Juiced* should fit in nicely.

- Publisher: THQ
- Developer: Juice Games
- ETA: Summer 2005
- Website: www.thq.com



TOP 10 Utterly meaningless pieces of gaming trivia

- In *Half-Life*, Barney the hapless security guard is named after Hannibal Lecter's guard in *The Silence Of The Lambs*.
- In one level of *Hitman 2*, there are pizza boxes with the Danish words 'ægte pizza med lort på' on them. This translates to 'genuine pizza with shit on it'.
- In *Halo*, when Master Chief reloads you can see Hippo heads on the shotgun shells.
- The name of the baddie in *Doom 3* is Betruger, taken from the fact that the word 'Betrug' in German means fraud or deceit.
- The dolls that the kiddie Julia is playing with in *Tribes: Vengeance* are the *Freedom Force* heroes – also made by Irrational Games.
- In *Splinter Cell*, the equipment on the oil-rig is made by firms called 'Weylanda' and 'Yutani'. The name of the corporation in the *Alien* movies is 'Weyland-Yutani'.
- At points in *Max Payne 2* the cast sing the closing music. A janitor sings it, Mona sings it in the shower and two goons even play it on a piano. It's called 'Late Goodbye'.
- Bastila Shan was originally the name of the Juhani character in *KOTOR*, but the names were changed about during development.
- SCi games may have a cool logo, but the company name originally stood for Sales Curve Interactive. Which isn't half as cool or sexy.
- A legendary hero called Rustam is often mentioned in *PoP*. He was an immensely strong Persian warrior who slew a white elephant with one hit at the age of ten.

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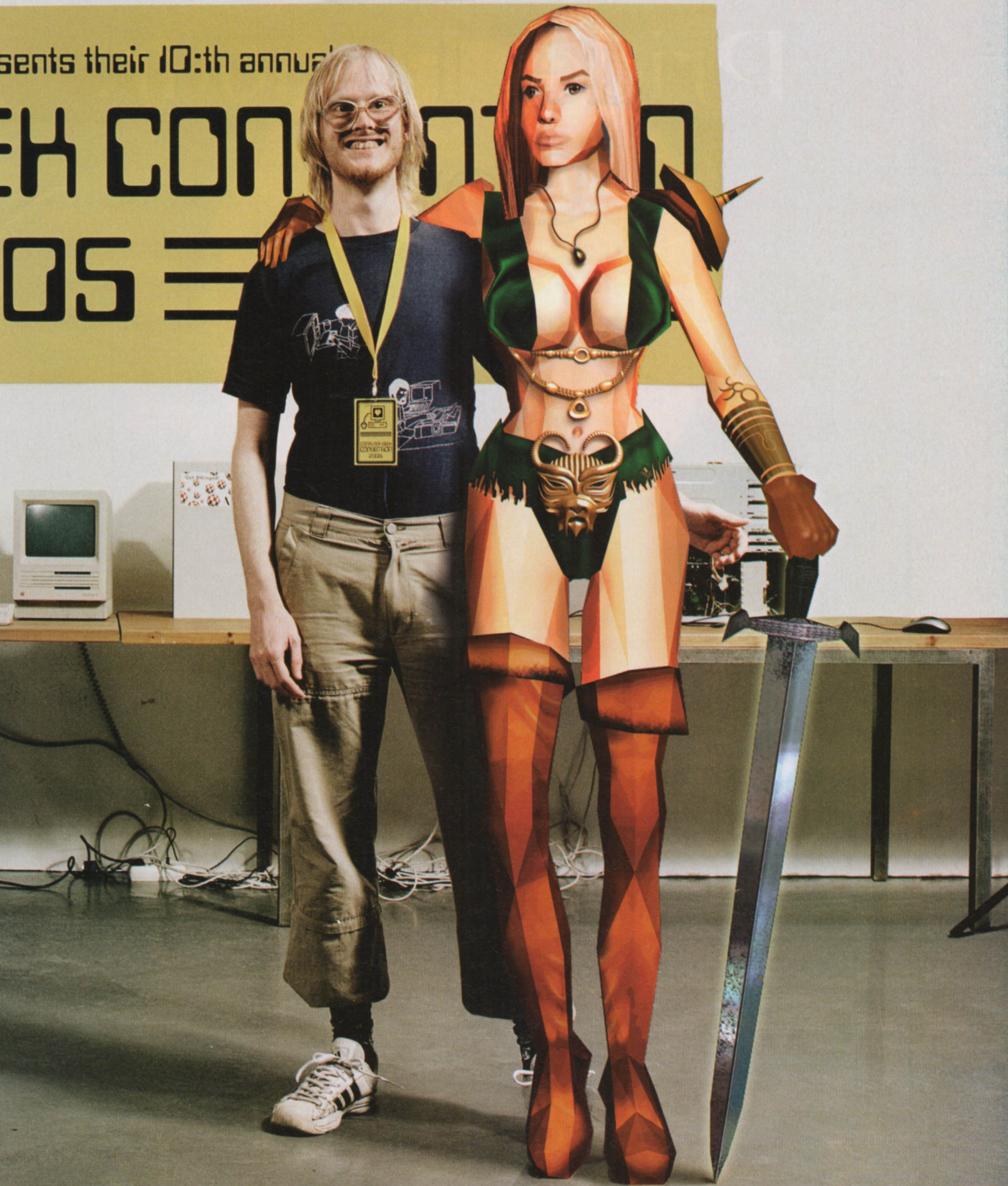
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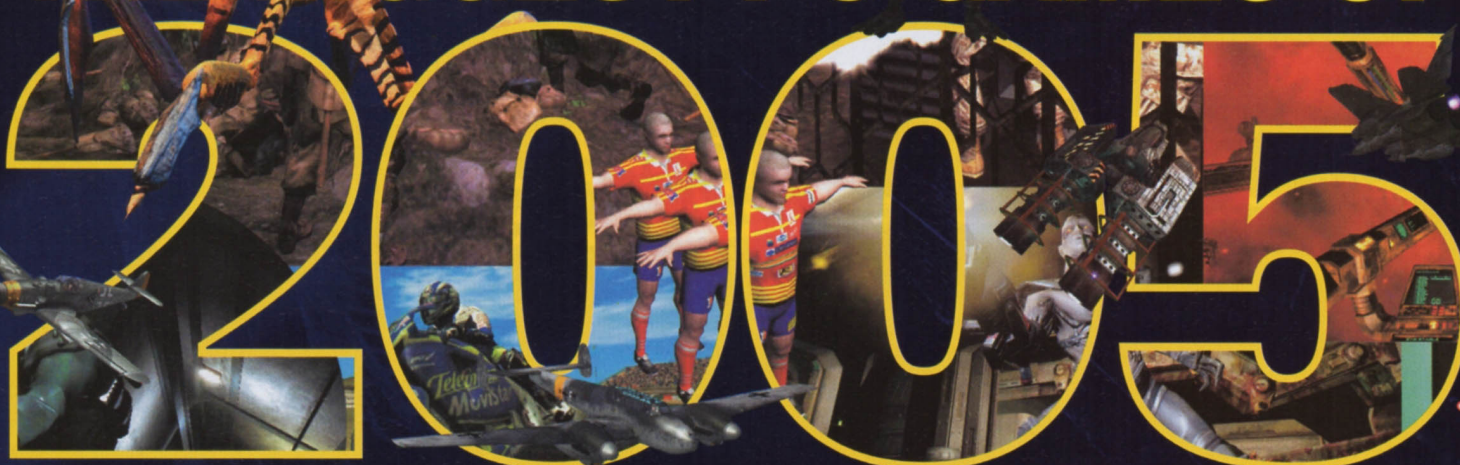
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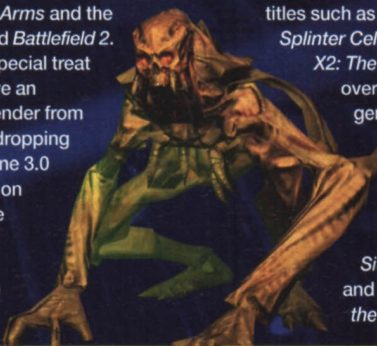


SO THAT was 2004, undoubtedly the most exciting year in PC gaming history, with *Half-Life 2*, *Doom 3* and *Rome: Total War* just three titles that have enslaved us to our keyboards over the past 12 months. But while the rest of us are nursing hangovers from the Christmas festivities, the PC gaming market goes marching relentlessly on with yet another impressive line-up for the coming year.

Kicking things off is our world-exclusive preview of the stunning new RTS *Star Wars: Empire At War*. Developed by Petroglyph, a company formed by a group of ex-Westwood bods, *Empire At War* is a galaxy-spanning strategy epic set after *Episode III*, with a whole host of new characters, planets, units and

spectacular battles – the Force-ful preview begins on page 30.

Following on, we begin the shooter category, which boasts several titanic titles such as Monolith's stunning-looking *F.E.A.R.*, the *Doom 3* engine-powered *Quake IV*, Gearbox's ultra-realistic WWII FPS *Brothers In Arms* and the long-awaited *Battlefield 2*. Plus, as a special treat we also have an exclusive render from Epic's jaw-dropping Unreal Engine 3.0 technology on p35, and we have a very good idea which game it's from...



Other categories are no slouches either – *Black & White 2* and *The Movies* both look like they could help revolutionise the strategy and god game genres, while *Empire Earth II* looks like picking up where the original left off.

Oh, and let's not forget behemoth titles such as *GTA: San Andreas*, *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, *X2: The Return*, and the long overdue rebirth of the RPG genre thanks to the likes of *Dungeon Siege II*, *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth*, *Bioshock* and *Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords*. 2004? Pschaw and Pfaff! 2005 is set to be the year to remember...

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

EDITOR'S ODDS FOR 2005

As you may well have noticed, there are a host of games missing from our list that have either yet to be announced or are unlikely to appear in 2005. In these cases, our in-house bookie and editor Dave Woods has provided his expert opinion (based on a subtle combination of blind guesswork and unsubstantiated speculation) on what the odds are for seeing these games in 2005. You can find these broken down into handy categories and scattered liberally throughout these pages. Place your bets now...

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK THE ONLINE PREVIEWS STARTING ON P104!

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STRATEGY

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Petroglyph/LucasArts | www.petroglyphgames.com

Martin Korda uncovers the world's first details behind LucasArts' top secret RTS project

ETA
Autumn
2005

SCOOPS don't get much bigger than this. Having sent our Bothans on an infiltration mission into LucasArts' virtually impregnable fortress, we've managed to get our hands on the world's first concrete details on *Star Wars: Empire At War*. This is an RTS still so early in development, so carefully guarded that the title you see boldly emblazoned across the top of this page and on the front cover is still unconfirmed at the time of going to press.

And as if that wasn't exciting enough, we've also discovered that the game is being designed by the newly formed development house Petroglyph, a team forged from some of the game industry's most talented individuals, including several former Westwood employees who worked on many of the *Command & Conquer* titles. Add to this the guidance of LucasArts and the titanic war-based

discovered and deliberated over the details, ogled at the screenshots and endlessly discussed the possibilities of what's in store. As part of their mission, our Bothans (most of whom died while trying to deliver this info to us) managed to hunt down and interrogate Brett Tosti, LucasArts' producer on *Empire At War*, who revealed numerous tantalising morsels of information for you to chew over.

CAN YOU FEEL THE FORCE?

Empire At War will be set during the classic *Star Wars* period, predominantly centring around the events of *Episode IV: A New Hope*, though there will be a certain amount of crossover from *Episode III*. "The game begins two years before *A New Hope*," states Brett. "We'll be trying to weave stories around the characters and events from that film, so

"This is an RTS that combines the gameplay of modern strategy games with the rich *Star Wars* universe"

BRETT TOSTI PRODUCER AT LUCASARTS ON *EMPIRE AT WAR*

possibilities provided by the *Star Wars* universe, and you've got the recipe for what may be an RTS so planet-shattering that it could make the Death Star look like a water pistol.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves just yet, at least not until we've

you'll see how certain heroes came to be where they are or how one planet came to be under one side's control. You can also expect to see Acclamator-class assault ships – as seen in *Episode II* – fly alongside Imperial Star Destroyers from classic *Star Wars*."

Star Destroyers? Acclamator assault ships? That can only mean one thing. Space and planet-based missions bundled together in one strategic package. In fact, a quick scan (go on have a look...) over these pages confirms that the game is promising to be the first ever strategy game to meld the epic 3D space-based battles of *Homeworld* with more traditional ground-based RTS missions. This is something which, if done right, could just propel Petroglyph's project into a new real-time strategy game dimension.

But how will *Empire At War* manage to stand out from an already hugely competitive RTS field? "It combines the gameplay of modern RTS games with the rich





And that's why speeders shouldn't eat curries.

Star Wars universe, but it's crafted in such a way as to introduce innovation and remove some of the repetition and tedious aspects that have crept into the genre," says Brett.

"It doesn't have linear missions like most traditional RTS games. Instead, it has a persistent real-time world in which you're trying to conquer planets and essentially take over the entire *Star Wars* galaxy, whether you're playing as the Empire or the Rebellion," he continues. "There are two sections to the game – troop-moving/planning and combat

– but unlike, say, *Rome: Total War*, which uses a different engine for each section, we're using the same engine for both to make sure they feel connected. The engine automatically adapts to suit each gaming mode." Sounds a little like a real-time *Civilization* campaign interspersed with 3D real-time battles to us. "Exactly. Once you've moved your ships into position and decided to fight, the engine moves into Combat Mode until the battle is resolved," confirms Brett.

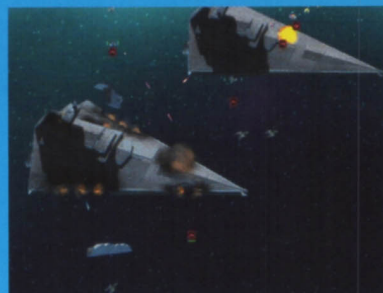
So how about the space combat sections, what can we expect from those? "Space combat is an

NET WARS

FEEL THE FORCE ONLINE

Usually at this stage, a developer is either unwilling or unable to talk about its game's multiplayer options. In this case though, we have an exception. "There'll be multiplayer head-to-head campaigns, as well as free-for-all skirmish battles in the tradition of RTS gameplay," promises LucasArts' producer, Brett Tosti. "You'll also be able to rank yourself against other players on a global ladder."

It might not be much information to be going on with, but it's a start. Let's just hope that the global ladder will enable you to find and play against other people of your own ability, rather than having to put up with consistently being trounced by slack-tongued spods who've quit their jobs and disowned their families in order to concentrate on becoming the best commander in the galaxy. Here's hoping...



Multiplayer will have an online league.

integral part of projecting force across the galaxy and as a preparation for land invasion," reveals Brett. "Space battles have a unique character to them. They're about massive capital ships manoeuvring to bring turbo lasers to bear as they blow each other up, one piece at a time. All the while, the more nimble fighters and corvettes dogfight in their own dance of death in a quest to get a clear shot at unleashing proton torpedo attacks on the larger ships."

Judging by these early in-game screenshots, space battles are looking like being epic affairs, intergalactic

slugfests between titanic destroyers complemented by dozens of buzzing, smaller fighters. But as Brett explains, these levels should avoid the often-daunting complexity of *Homeworld's* fully freeform space skirmishes.

"We have our units on planes. It's a 3D world, but in terms of the camera angle, space battles won't feel too dissimilar to the ground battles. We don't want you spinning around on both axis and getting lost in the 3D world."

However, one way in which these space-based battles will compare closely to *Homeworld's* is through the



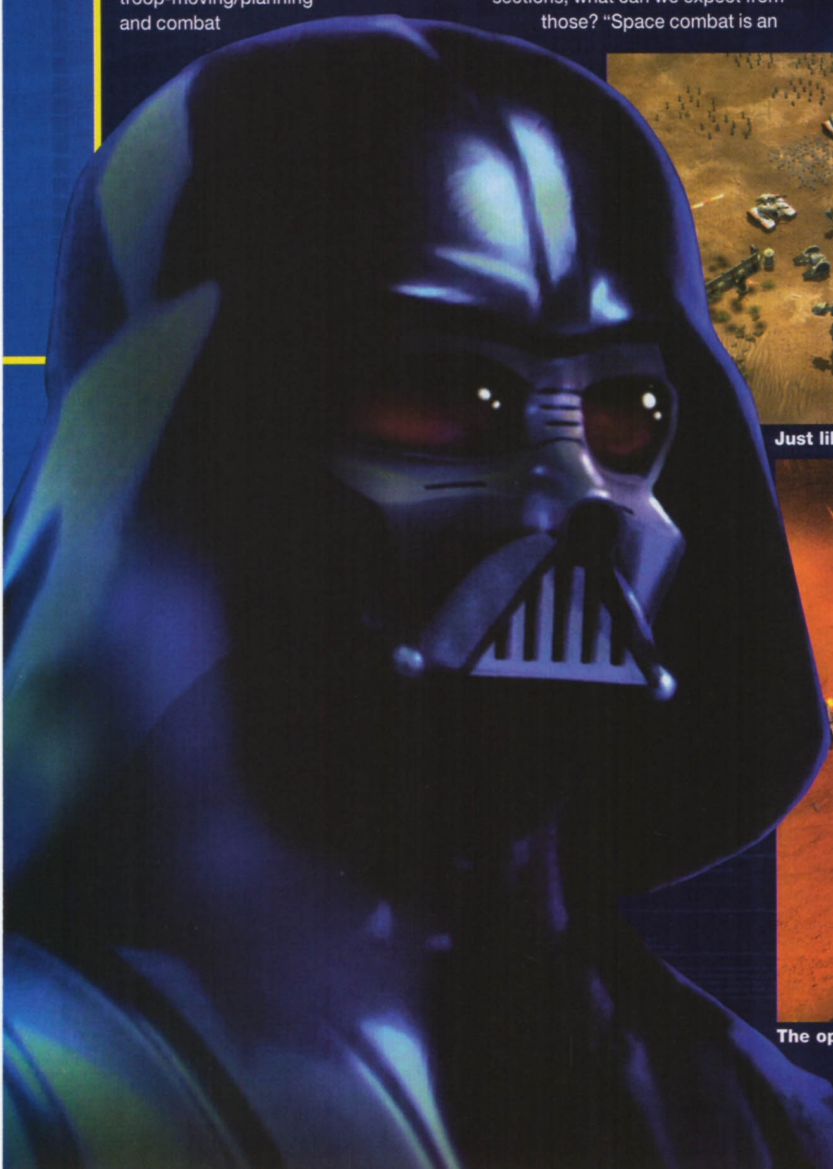
Just like the film! Yes!



Could this be the first quality *Star Wars* RTS?

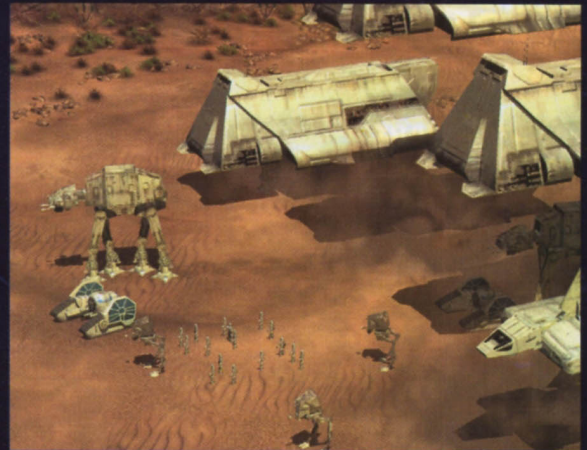


The option to launch daring raids means you won't always have to fight full battles.

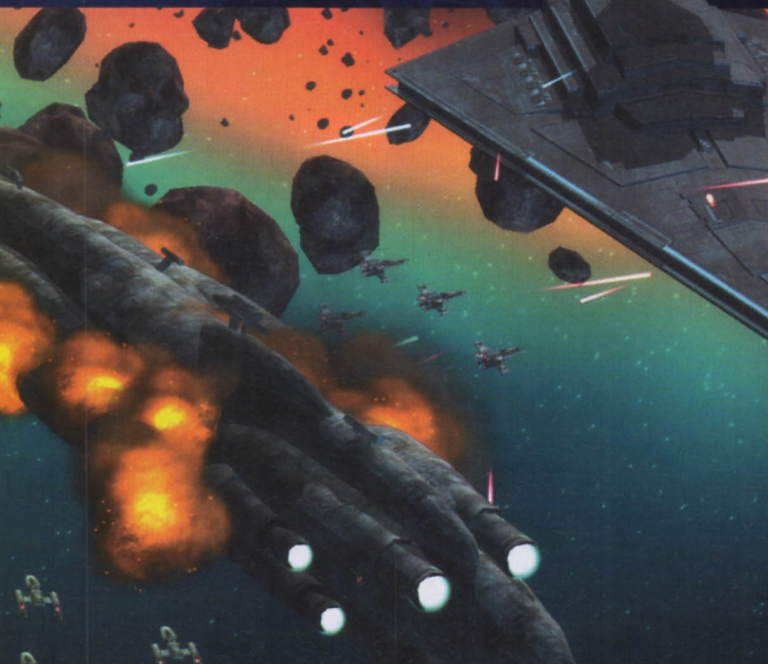




Bring down AT-ATs with a speeder's harpoon.



You'll be able to play as both the Rebellion and the Empire.



Capital ships will trade hammer blows, while fighters vie for a clear torpedo shot.



Several ex-Westwood members are part of the game's development team.

extensive strategies made available to you. These include tactics like concealing your ships in asteroid fields while you lie in wait for the unsuspecting enemy to float by, or the ability to target specific parts of enemy capital ships

the context of the movies. The exact format of these will depend on the context of the galaxy as dictated by your actions. What if Dantooine was still defended by the Rebels when the Empire arrived? What if a large

"In-game battles from the movies include Hoth and the Battle Of Yavin"

BRETT TOSTI PRODUCER AT LUCASARTS ON *EMPIRE AT WAR*

such their engines, in order to severely hinder their manoeuvrability.

Now, I bet that by now you're shuffling uncomfortably in your seat, palms clammy, teeth grinding as you wonder what missions from the films you'll be able to sink your now worn-down molars into. I'm right aren't I? Well, let's tackle that question right now.

WHAT IF...?

Once again, the portents are good. Very good. "Battles from the movies that will be in the game include the battle on Hoth and the Battle of Yavin," comes Brett's reassuring reply. "In addition, there'll be battles that represent hypothetical or implied battles from

contingent of Rebel ships were present at Yavin? What about the Empire invasion of Yavin IV after the Death Star was destroyed? These and other scenarios are available as tactical battles that you can participate in."

STAY GROUNDED

Right, let's move on to the ground-based missions, which sound like they could be every bit as enthralling as their frenetic interstellar counterparts.

Once again, these missions are being designed to be heavily reliant on your ability to effectively utilise realistic battle tactics. "There are countless tactics available such as invading with a small force on a well-defended planet with the

SIZE ISSUES

IT'S NOT HOW BIG THEY ARE, IT'S WHAT YOU DO WITH THEM

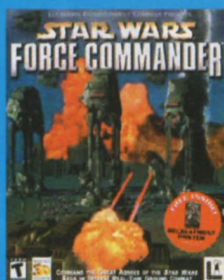
Petroglyph and LucasArts have yet to decide the exact size of the game's battles, but it's an issue that they're spending plenty of time perfecting. "We won't be having battles containing thousands of units as we're not looking to have that big horde feel where no unit feels special. We'll be having units that feel very important like Star Destroyers, which come with their own special tactical possibilities. We don't have any problems displaying lots of units on screen with our new engine, so we can make our battles as big as we want to. Saying that though, we want to make sure they're fun to play too," explains Brett.



The maximum size of space and ground battles is yet to be decided.

FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

COMMANDING FORCE NOT A FORCE COMMANDER



This was rubbish.

Star Wars RTS games have never exactly done the films justice, and the worst of the lot was the criminally dire *Force Commander*. Understandably, we've all grown a bit suspicious of any RTS containing *Star Wars* in its title, but it's a worry that producer Brett Tosti believes *Empire At War* will dispel with aplomb. "Our extensive experience with *Dune II*, and the *Command & Conquer* and *Red Alert* series has helped with not just crafting an RTS engine and making it look spectacular, but determining what plays well," he assures us.

"Also, this game is very different from *Force Commander*. Although both are RTS games at their

core, this game improves upon previous *Star Wars* RTS games because it takes the basic RTS formula and adapts it to fit the *Star Wars* universe rather than the other way round. In addition, it captures the fun bits of a cohesive galactic campaign." Let's just hope he's right.

intent of not achieving victory, but rather to destroy certain outlying special structures for great effect on the strategic game. Alternatively, you could use scouts to reveal the enemy in order to enable long-range artillery to attack from a relatively safe distance. Or you may want to call in invasion transports at a key moment in order to get maximum tactical advantage," says Brett.

VERY, VERY TASTY

It all sounds more mouth-moistening than a platter of skewered barbecued meat – or a plate of cabbage garnished with sprouts and turnips (I'm guessing) if you're one of those veggie types – especially the ability to launch hit-and-run attacks on enemy strongholds in order to disable key installations. The possibilities here are endless. Just imagine if you could cunningly infiltrate the enemy's defences and blow up ground-based space cannons or shield generators so your fleet could pass through a sector more safely, or have more of a chance when attacking a collection of Star Destroyers, or even the Death Star itself?

Of course, this kind of set-up, whereby space and ground battles dynamically complement each other rather than existing as separate entities, also means that you'll sometimes find yourself on the defensive, a situation that will once again come with its own unique strategic options. These, we've been promised, will include the ability to fall back to different levels of your base and harness combined arms and terrain advantage.



For space combat missions think *Homeworld*.

"These battles will be significant in their own way, and it's likely there'll be assaults similar to the battle on Hoth – where you must make a hasty retreat to fight another day in the face of a superior invasion," claims Brett. "Retreating would be the exception though, since a skilled player can achieve victory even against a superior force if clever tactics are employed."

ON THE DEFENSIVE

But let's face it, retreat is for lily-livered wimps and mewling cry-babies, so thankfully, there'll be plenty of ways to try and avoid it. Brett suggests a number of ways off the cuff.

"The defender could flank the attacker in order to attack the invaders by surprise from the sides or rear, or they could race out to defeat the initial invasion force before the bulk of the invader's forces can land. In addition, there are varieties of tactics that are dictated by



Judging by this, larger space-based missions will be fantastic pyrotechnic affairs.




Even at this early stage, *Empire At War* is looking very promising.

the kinds of forces in play and the terrain being fought over."

One thing that both Petroglyph and LucasArts are very aware of is that they aren't just aiming to make a great strategy game, but also one that fully reflects the world and technology of the *Star Wars* universe. It's something that Brett believes *Empire At War* will do full justice to. "Much of the technical flavour of *Star Wars* is present," he says. "This includes speeders being able to entangle AT-AT's legs occasionally, as well as shields that block certain kinds of weapons,

repulsorlift vehicles that can travel over water and even planetary-based ion cannons that cause no end of hassle for an enemy blockading fleet."

So just how excited (or indifferent) should you be getting? Well, while *Star Wars: Empire At War* may still be in the very early phases of development, if what Brett claims is true and the game really does combine space and ground-based missions in a freeform, dynamic campaign while fully utilising real tactics and truly harnessing the *Star Wars* universe, then it could just prove to be one of the pivotal moments in the evolution of the RTS. One that could banish the memory of *Force Commander* to a dark, dark place, far, far away. Petroglyph, may the Force be with you. 



The Rebel fleet mobilises for an assault.



TIE Crawlers are a new *Star Wars* unit.



NEW UNREAL TOURNAMENT?

■ Pub: Midway | Dev: Epic Games |
www.epicgames.com

Epic gives us another tantalising glimpse of its gorgeous new game. And the penny has just dropped...

WHO ARE our most favourite developers in the world? It's tough when you're looking at the top, but it's more than fair to say that when anything from Epic drops onto our desks, our noses get a bit damper and our coats get a bit glossier.

Since our cover on the new Unreal Engine 3.0, everything's gone quiet on the Epic front. We've been emailing the company almost every week in a bid to make it crack, but so far it's held firm. And then this image arrived after a request for info for our 'Best Of 2005' feature.

Allegedly it's not game specific, and it recently graced a cover of a US magazine, accompanying a feature on Unreal Engine 3.0. Epic says that it's a further example of the power that Unreal Engine 3.0 is going to wield.

But we think we know more. We know for a fact that this is Malcolm from *Unreal Tournament* and we're going to take this to mean that a new version of the best online shooter in the world is due sometime this year. Which would obviously be an event of such magnitude that the earth would actually stop spinning, if for but a second. As soon as we get any more information, you'll be the first to know. [E]

**ETA
TBC
2005**

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

CALL OF DUTY 2
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **2/1**
HALF-LIFE 2 EXPANSION PACK
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **2/1**
MAX PAYNE 3
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **3/1**
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 3
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **10/1**
FAR CRY 2
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **20/1**
COUNTER-STRIKE 2
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **25/1**
TEAM FORTRESS 2
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **100/1**
MAFIA 2
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **100/1**
HALO 2
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **500/1**
DUKE NUKEM FOREVER
 ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **673/1**



You'll be stalked by demonic Hunters – and not because they want your autograph.

DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Nerve/id Software | www.doom3.com

**Just when he thought he was out,
Will Porter is dragged straight back in**

I'M NOT a cynic, although if I was I'd be having a field day with *Doom 3: Resurrection Of Evil*. It's got a gravity gun? There's bullet-time? There'll be scoffs and pschaws when the expansion hits, that's for sure, but from what we've seen there should be some jumps and thrills as well. Valve may have already perfected the physics gun, but that doesn't curtail the glee you feel when you snatch an imp's fireball and throw it back in his stupid brown face or lob a pickaxe at a skittering slow-motion trite.

Developed by Nerve Software (who previously worked on the excellent multiplayer side of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*) and overseen by the guys

at id, *Resurrection Of Evil* takes place two years after the close of *Doom 3*. You no longer play the gruff marine grunt of the original – he's presumably off chugging beers and shooting varmints back on earth – but instead fill the UAC-stamped shoes of a combat engineer. Under the command of one Dr. Elizabeth McNeil, the woman who previously blew the whistle on Betruger and called in Swann to shut him down, you're heading back to Mars to investigate mysterious activity around a dormant UAC excavation excitingly labelled Site 1. (*Doom 3* itself took place at Site 3, so we can only assume that id have some unannounced plans for Site 2).

ETA
When it's
done
2005

The game opens with yourself and a collection of other rugged chaps cutting into an ancient burial chamber, deep within the ruins of Mars' ancient alien civilisation. Here lies an ancient relic, not created by the forces of good (like the Soulcube was) but instead moulded in the very flames of the pits of hell. It's one of those 'ultimate weapon' type things, and as soon as you touch it the connection between Satan's household and our universe is re-established, and (wait for it) all of a sudden (here it

comes...) all hell breaks loose. (It all goes to hell in a hand-basket. It starts to get hella good, etc.)

Your primary objective, then, is to take this ancient relic through the strange alien ruins in the bowels of Mars and up to Elizabeth McNeil in the UAC facility perched above – presumably facing off against Betruger as you go. He's not your only worry though, since there are also three arch-demons known as Hunters hot on your trail and desperate to snatch the relic



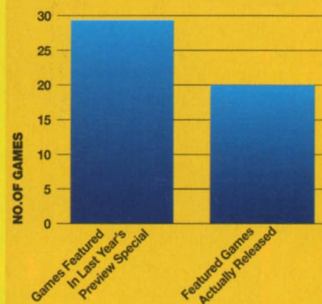
"Give me a hand old chap, I've gone and got my blasted fingers stuck."

**"Snatch an imp's fireball and throw
it back in his stupid brown face"**

ZONE AND THE ART OF SOOTHSAYING

THIS IS 2005, BUT THAT WAS 2004 – HOW DID WE FARE LAST YEAR?

If you were around this time last year, you'll no doubt remember that we ran a similar preview special in *PC ZONE* 137, in which we predicted which games would be the big hitters of 2004. But how many of them actually appeared in 2004? And how did we fare in picking out the best games of the year? Well, thanks to an advanced scientific formula, we've managed to extrapolate the following information, and you know what? We think we did pretty damn well...



% SUCCESS RATE: 69%



% SUCCESS RATE: 80%



Is it just us, or has that space marine in the lower right eaten one too many space-pies?

away from you. Murderise these bosses and your ancient artefact absorbs their satanic powers. The first spectral ability you steal is bullet-time – no, sorry, 'Hell-Time', which differs from bullet-time slightly in that everything in the world slows down except you. You also have to recharge your hell-device using the immortal souls of the dead UAC employees that you come across.

LEVITATION'S WHAT YOU NEED

Of course the other big sell is the Grabber, or Ionised Plasma Levitator, that'll allow you to pick up pretty much any object up to the size of a barrel. So, rockets, fireballs, corridor furniture, trites, bodies and (obviously) barrels are all fair game for your extended demon-battery. Physics guns, as you're now aware, are brill, and the Grabber presumably appears as part of id's desire to give you what you want. And why not?

Those who moaned about the marine not being able to point his torch and his boomstick at the same time are also having their whining answered, with the addition of an HEV, sorry 'enviro-suit' that not only counters radioactive waste but also has a dinky light strapped onto it. With the helmet on, it also muffles sound in an engagingly atmospheric manner, but is not, I repeat *not*, orange.

Pride of place in the list of fan demands, however, is the reintroduction of the double-barrelled shotgun – the weapon that suggests that *Resurrection Of Evil* is very much the *Doom 2* to *Doom 3*'s *Doom 1* (if indeed that makes any sense whatsoever). Purloined from the office of Sarge, the gruff military man you relieved of a BFG in the last game, this little beauty certainly looks and

MONSTER MASH

WHO'LL BE JAMMIN' GOOD WITH WEIRD AND GILLY AND THE SPIDERS FROM MARS?

Well, first up there are the blue-fire-hurling Vulgars, faster than Imps and notably spinier. Then there are the Bruisers – colossi with cannons strapped to their arms that take a hell of a lot of punishment. The Forgotten, meanwhile, are a less techie-version of *Lost Souls* (with horns instead of metallic head-braces). Add to the mix three Hunters and a cackling Betruger-beast and the menagerie is nearly complete.



New add-on, new monsters.

sounds meatier than its counterparts and could well ignite any residual fanboyism that lies in the casual observer. Furthermore, multiplayer has been tweaked to cater for a whole eight players (wool!) and, naturally, been afforded the newfound ability to zap encroaching rockets and hurl them back at your skulking enemies.

So then, it's not an expansion that reeks of originality, but is more than likely to provide some thrills and spills that are suitably different from its precursor.

A fair amount of the old *Doom* thunder may have been taken by Mr. Freeman, but (should David Bowie ever ask) there is most definitely still life on Mars. [E]

★★★
PCZONE
PRESENTS THE
BIGGEST
PC GAMES OF
2005
★★★

SHOOTERS

SWAT 4

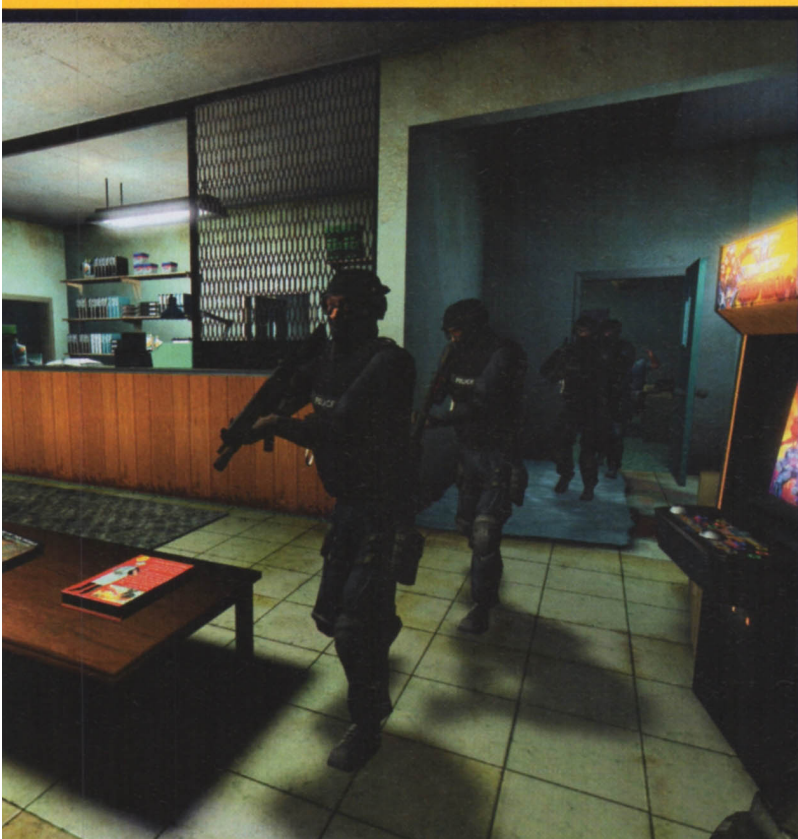


SWAT 4

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Irrational Games | www.swat4.com

Martin Korda swats up on the latest info on Irrational's stunning-looking strategic shooter

ETA
April
2005



You can control any member of your team at any time.



The Unreal engine makes **SWAT 4** look incredibly lifelike.

TWO AND

a half years ago at E3, we sat through a demonstration of the Sierra-developed strategic shooter *SWAT 4: Urban Justice*. To say

that we were underwhelmed would be putting it mildly. The game was, quite frankly, a disgrace, with appalling AI. Exactly why it was shown is anyone's guess.

But fear not – much has changed since then. In fact, everything has changed since then. The *SWAT 4* that now stares back at you from these pages with come-and-get-me eyes is a totally different game, developed by a totally different team (the one responsible for the excellent *Tribes: Vengeance*). It also features a totally different engine. The Unreal engine and the Havok physics

library to be precise. Bit tasty isn't it?

So we caught up with Paul Pawlicki, *SWAT 4*'s associate producer at Vivendi Universal Games and slammed his fingers in a draw until he divulged the latest info on what's already threatening to be one of 2005's big hitters...

INTO ACTION

SWAT 4 places you firmly into the Special Weapons And Tactics team tasked with undertaking dangerous urban missions.

"*SWAT 4* brings the law enforcement experience to the strategic shooter genre," explains Paul. "You experience what it's like to be a part of the revered law enforcement unit, and learn how to lead a team of highly-trained officers and quickly execute a plan through our context-sensitive interface. You're also challenged with gameplay situations unique to law enforcement

MULTIPLYING THE FUN

JOIN SWAT 4'S ONLINE POLICE FORCE

SWAT 4 is being designed with multiplayer very much in mind – Irrational is currently working on three different multiplayer modes. The first of these is Team Deathmatch which pits SWAT against Suspects. "You can earn more points by arresting the Suspects than shooting them dead. The Suspects are also equipped with Zip Cuffs and will be able to restrain the SWAT officers," promises Paul.

Next up is Rapid Deployment. "This is a game mode in which SWAT is tasked with finding and defusing bombs. The bombs are randomly placed within the levels and SWAT has to locate and defuse them. The Suspects must prevent SWAT from doing so. Oh, and did I mention there are suicide bombers?" Sounds terrifying.

Finally, the game is set to include a VIP mode in which SWAT escort a VIP to an extraction point, while the Suspects do their best to take out the VIP before they reach safety. If this kind of multiplayer isn't your bag though, don't worry – you and your mates can just play through the single-player campaign cooperatively. Sorted.



SWAT 4 is set in a fictional metropolitan city teeming with crime.

"This places you firmly in the SWAT team, undertaking dangerous urban missions"

such as barricaded suspects, serving warrants on hostile suspects and hostage rescues."

THE REAL DEAL

In order to ensure the game's authenticity, Irrational has hired Ken Thatcher, a 25-year SWAT team veteran, who's been overseeing every part of the game's development. "It was important to the team to create an experience that was visually authentic, and punctuate that with tactical gameplay based on real-world SWAT tactics," says Paul.

"Ken's overseen everything, from animation to how the AI should behave in a hostile situation. You see your AI-controlled team-mates breach doors, clear rooms and snap to corners in the same manner as their real-life counterparts.

"Combat with suspects is very strategic too – you have to seek cover and stay calm under fire. You won't be able to run into a room with guns blazing as you risk not only your own life, but the lives of your squad-mates too."

Making sure your team members don't die prematurely by blindly rushing

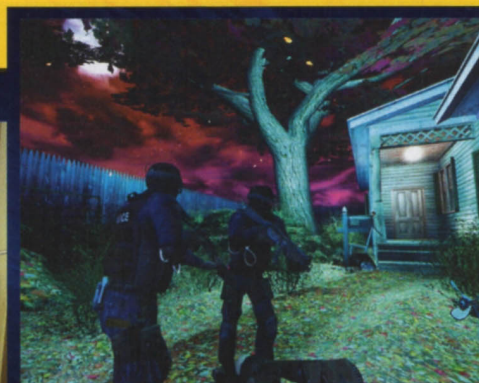
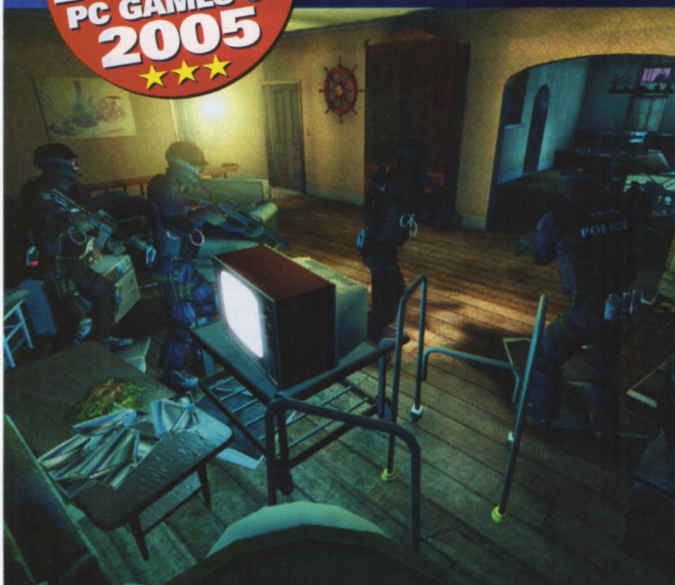
into dangerous areas will hopefully be made all the easier by the game's context-sensitive and – according to Paul – intuitive command interface.

EASY PEASY

"Irrational Games has done a great job creating an easy-to-use interface. I swear to you that it takes more time to describe than it does to learn – it's that easy," he claims. "Default commands are dynamic and change on-the-fly based on the location of the crosshair. The game actually predicts what you want to do. So, if you're pointing at a door, your default command states 'Open and Clear'. Simply press the spacebar to give your team the order and watch them open the door and clear the room." Sounds good so far...

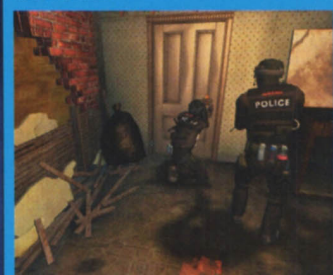
"If you want to do something other than the default command, then just right-click the mouse and a list of available commands pops up, such as breaching or wedging doors, looking around corners with mirrors, securing suspects or clearing rooms using flashbangs or CS gas. Just click the one you want and watch your team respond."

If what Paul says proves to be true, then *SWAT 4* might just prove to be



TESTICULAR FORTITUDE

SWAT 4 enables you to take charge of whatever slice of the pie you want. In the sequence below, you can jump into the fray at any point, or sit back, give orders and follow in from the rear. Irrational claims the AI will react to you intelligently, giving the appearance that you're working in a group of real-life humans.



We command Red 1 to place a C2 breaching charge on a locked door. The rest of the squad stack up.



After a hand signal three-count, Red 1 blows the door. Red 2 prepares to enter the room first.



Red 2 passes Red 1, who waits in cover for Red 2's entry.

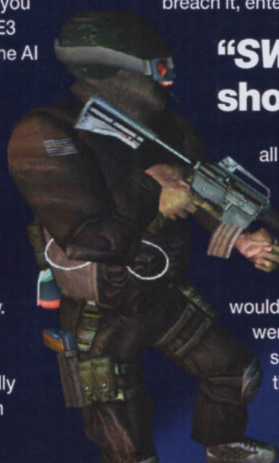


Red 2 enters the room and begins clearing, with Red 1 right behind. We're, ahem, bringing up the rear.

Enemies spawn randomly, so you never know where they are. Havok physics is sure to make SWAT 4 highly realistic.

the game that blows this often inaccessible genre wide open for the masses to enjoy.

According to Paul, Irrational has been working feverishly on SWAT 4's AI in order to ensure that you don't get a repeat of the E3 debacle back in 2002. "The AI can choose to fight, run for cover or give up when you shout at them to comply," boasts Paul. "In some cases, if the AI's morale is high, they won't give up. It's then up to you to apply a little pressure to convince them to comply. To do this, you can use anything from pepper spray and Tasers to deadly force – or just shoot them in the leg."



And how about your squad-mates, what can you expect to see from them? "They behave using real SWAT tactics," comes Paul's confident reply. "They stack up on a door, check it, breach it, enter the room and clear it –

"SWAT 4 could propel the tactical shooter genre into the mainstream"

all the while covering each other and behaving like real SWAT members."

Of course, all of this so-called innovative AI would be wasted if enemies were always found in the same places, a shortfall that Irrational is very keen to avoid. "One of the best features in

SWAT 4 is the random spawning of suspects – they're never in the same place twice. Doors you needed to breach with gas before may not have anyone behind them second time around. Just like in an authentic

SWAT situation, you won't know who's behind the door even if you've played the mission before."

Paul also informed us that thanks to a Quick Mission Maker, you'll be able to create your own scenarios and levels, where you can customise every tiny detail, down to the morale of each enemy.

NOW THERE'S AN IDEA

SWAT 4 is also promising some truly original ideas. The first of these is the Helmet Camera Window, which enables you to split your team up and see what the other group is doing in a mini-window. Not only will this help you keep track of where your other team members are, but it'll also allow you to issue on-the-fly commands to far-off squad members.

Another imaginative feature is the 'Friendly Sniper'. "Snipers are placed in strategic locations outside of your objective," explains Paul. "They report to you when they see suspects or hostages. At that point, you take control of the sniper through a window on your HUD and take the shot." It's a simple yet powerful addition, and it's amazing that no-one's thought of it before.

As you can see, SWAT 4 is now looking more 'shit hot' than 'a turd on a stick' thanks to Irrational. If it manages to deliver on its potential, SWAT 4 could be the game that propels the tactical shooter genre into the mainstream, while still managing to retain all of the hardcore strategic elements that made the SWAT series so great in the first place. Look out for our exclusive hands-on next month.

PACKING A PUNCH

MORE WEAPONS THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A TASER AT

What tactical shooter would be complete without a terrifying collection of weaponry? Not SWAT 4, that's for sure. With each team member's arsenal fully configurable before the start of each mission, you'll be able to make the most of hardware like M4A1 rifles, silenced sub-machine guns, Colt 9mm pistols and Benelli shotguns.

There's also set to be plenty of protective equipment to shield your balls with, such as light and heavy armour, gas masks and goggles. Plus, if you're the more forgiving sort, you can kit up with non-lethal weapons such as Tasers and Pepper Ball guns. There's something for everyone here.



A wide range of weaponry should ensure that SWAT 4 is an explosive affair.

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Gearbox Software | www.brothersinarmsgame.com

A squad-based shooter that's both extremely realistic and focused on fun? **Martin Korda** investigates

ETA
Feb
2005

"Most WWII games are created by people who've never had real military training, but our team has"

Damage is dished out in an alarmingly realistic fashion, so keep your head down.

THE DEVELOPERS of *Brothers In Arms* have a tricky task on their hands. Their stated aim is to unify realism and fun in one explosive package, bringing the hardcore edge of say, *Op Flashpoint* together with the fun of *Call Of Duty*. It's quite an ambition, but having recently played the latest build of this impressive-looking WWII shooter, it's looking like they could well be on track.

Playing as Sgt Matt Baker, you get to relive the battles fought by the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment during the D-Day landings. "Every battle is a historically true battle. We've walked all the battlefields, been to the archives and talked to the veterans to make sure the game is as realistic as possible," explains

Colonel John Antal (ret), Gearbox's military adviser on *BIA*.

"To make the game fun and realistic we've spent time training our team. I trained them in what it's like to be a soldier and took them on field training exercises which simulated real battles. They even got to fire all of the authentic weapons. Most WWII games are created by people who've never fired a WWII weapon or had real military training, but our team has, which is why the game will feel so authentic," explains John.

PERSONALITY

In order to add an even greater sense of immersion, Gearbox is furnishing each squad member with a personality to ensure that you care about every man in your squad. "We think the story is very emotional. Most WWII games are about you. Here, you lead a human-like squad of men who you'll actually care about," claims John.

Making the game intuitive and easy to play is another area that Gearbox has been focussing on. The game's context-sensitive command system is perhaps the most efficient we've ever seen, allowing you to issue your troopers with on-the-fly commands both quickly and easily.



Every area in *BIA* has been carefully recreated to match its real-life equivalent.

You'll also be able to pause the action and zoom out in order to assess the battlefield and decide on your next move. When we played the game we found that your men don't only follow your orders like real soldiers, but act like human beings too, seeking out cover and shouting out their feelings in the midst of a firefight. What's more, you'll even get to command (though not drive) tanks and in certain missions, receive air support too.

BACK TO FRONT

During *BIA*'s eight-day campaign, you'll be sent on a variety of missions such as capturing the strategically essential French town of Carentan and leaping from

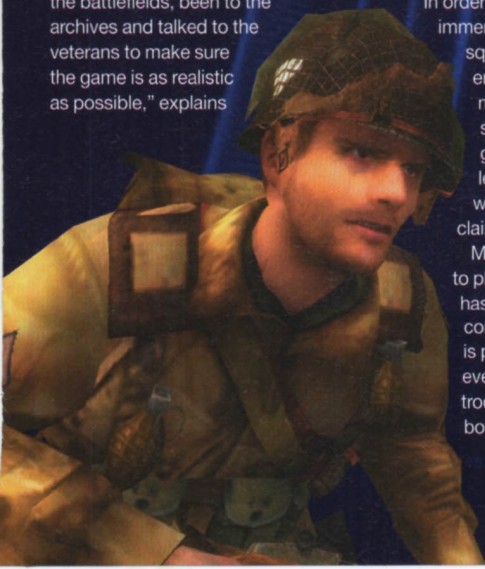
a plane in order to flank the enemy, only to find yourself isolated and weaponless in the wilderness.

However, as John explains, the game won't start on day one of the campaign. "You'll start on D-Day seven, where you'll find yourself under attack by well-trained German forces with lots of tanks. Then you'll pass out and have flashbacks to the eight days beforehand until you come back to this point."

Brothers In Arms is certainly looking impressive both in terms of realism and gameplay. And with its easy-to-use command system and some impressively lifelike AI, it's got a good crack at being the best WWII shooter yet. **ETA**



As is fashionable, every member of your squad will be able to display an array of realistic facial expressions.





Good shot! Hats off to you, sir!

PARIAH

ETA
March
2005

■ Pub: Hip Games | Dev: Digital Extremes | www.pariahgame.com

Who's afraid of *Half-Life 2*? Not these chaps, reports Anthony Holden

ZONE'S MOST WANTED 2005

WHAT ARE THE GAMES WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST?

PC ZONE TOP TEN MOST WANTED

- 1 F.E.A.R.
- 2 Battlefield 2
- 3 Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30
- 4 Quake IV
- 5 Black & White 2
- 6 Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic 2 – The Sith Lords
- 7 GTA: San Andreas
- 8 Elder Scrolls: Oblivion
- 9 Pariah
- 10 Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

DAVE: F.E.A.R.

JAMIE: Quake IV

PAUL: Battlefield 2

WILL: F.E.A.R.

SUZY: F.E.A.R.

MARTIN: Black & White 2

ANTHONY: Pariah

STEVE: Football Manager 2006

RICHIE: Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic – The Sith Lords

RHIANNA: The Movies

MICHAEL: F.E.A.R.

SAM: Operation Flashpoint 2

STEVE O: Quake IV



The lead characters have an almost charming ugliness to them.

FEW FPS developers can fail to be affected in some way by the release of *Half-Life 2*, so dazzling and unrivalled is Valve's achievement. Fewer still, however, can claim to be wholeheartedly thrilled by the game's ascendancy, but one such group is Canadian powerhouse Digital Extremes. For these FPS veterans, *Half-Life 2* doesn't set an impossible precedent, it simply paves the way for the company to follow.

"We're pleased to see *Half-Life 2* taking the next step in gaming," says DE founder James Schmalz. "Our goal is the

same for *Pariah*: to evolve the genre by immersing you in a well-presented story with interesting characters."

James, like Valve, recognises that evolving the action genre isn't just about having bigger guns and better shadows. Pure action and old-school twitch gaming simply doesn't cut it with today's gamers, and high-fidelity graphics demand an equally convincing experience across other areas. For Digital Extremes, the only way forward is, well, back – by returning to age-old values of storyline, character and dialogue.



Despite these common ideas, *Pariah* takes a slightly different approach from Valve when it comes to execution. While *Half-Life 2* thrusts you into a world of great depth and atmosphere, it keeps traditional narrative elements relatively sparse. And true to FPS convention, the character of Gordon Freeman is silent and one-dimensional, leaving a space for you to occupy as hero.

SILVER SCREEN

Pariah, on the other hand, attempts a more cinematic approach, usually reserved for third-person games. Rather than the taciturn ass-kicker, you enter the piece as Dr Jack Mason, a washed-up and disgraced medical scientist who's been sacked from his research project for insubordination. Demoted to the hazards of the Biological Threat Assessment Unit, he's pondering suicide until he's jolted into action by crash-landing on the prison planet called Earth.

Inevitably, some evil conspiracies emerge, but at its core, *Pariah* is the story of Jack Mason himself (however cheesy that might sound on paper). As you play the game, Jack gradually redeems himself through heroic action,



You have 16 hours before the government nukes the planet from orbit.

as well as finding a reason to live in the form of Karina, the mysterious female virus-carrier he's been sent to evacuate. And, because this is a sci-fi action game and not a romantic tragedy, he also eventually gains superhuman powers and becomes a one-man killing machine. It's your classic hero's journey.

"In any good story the protagonist changes and grows in some crucial way," explains James. "I don't think any FPS has done that before – really have

should have few concerns. After all, this is the team that brought you *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament*, and when it comes to explosive action, these guys definitely know their stuff.

RIP IT UP

In this case, the gameplay seems to be built on an idea of spectacular variety. Like *Half-Life 2*, the action shifts tempo and style continually, never giving you a chance to grow jaded or frustrated.

"All of us are big FPS fans and we wanted to give the genre more variety"

that critical element where the lead character goes through some emotional change through the telling of the story in some really obvious way."

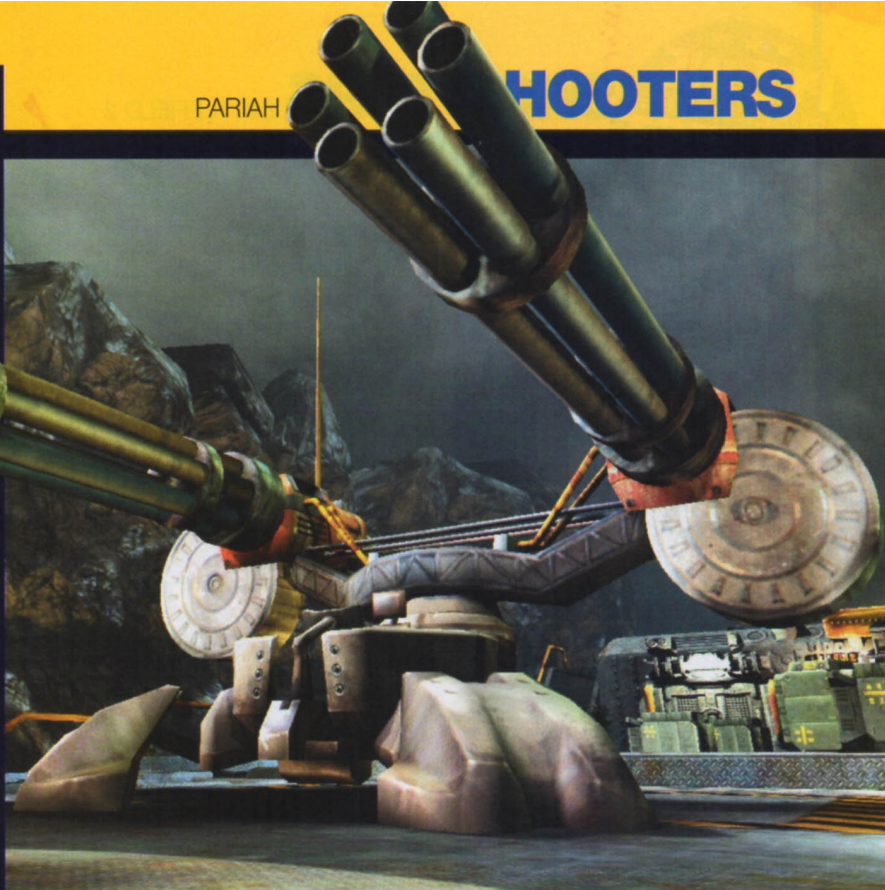
CRYING GAME

Whatever the result, it's great to see an FPS developer thinking in these terms. Digital Extremes is attempting to imbue action games with a bit more substance and depth, which is exactly what the medium needs right now. And if it ends up being the first FPS to elicit a tear from the *PC ZONE* team, so much the better.

As for the rest of *Pariah* – the gameplay that's actually going to keep you playing long enough to discover the story – you

Already, we've seen some of the game's impressive set-pieces. One involves leaping from ship to ship as two giant hover-ships skim across a desert plain, crashing through dunes and throwing up mountains of sand as they go. Others see you piloting vehicles through canyons and forests or manning rocket launchers as Karina takes the wheel.

"All of us are big FPS fans," says James. "We wanted to see the genre have more variety in the gameplay than the tried and true run-and-gun style we've all got used to. All along, we've been working on making sure *Pariah* had variety in both its approach to gameplay and its mechanics, and I'd say this is



Many of the weapons are made from bits of scrap.

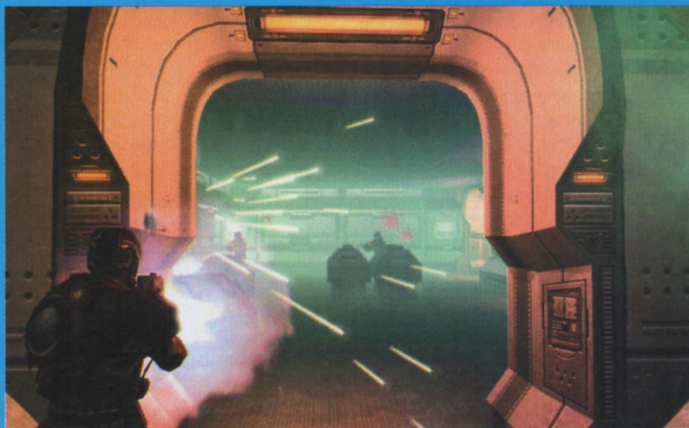
SELF-IMPROVEMENT

UPGRADEABLE WEAPONS ADD APPEAL TO *PARIAH*'S INVENTORY

One of the key game mechanics in *Pariah* is the concept of upgradeable weapons. During the course of the game, enemies drop things called Weapon Energy Cores or WECs, which give you the option of doing various upgrades. You can upgrade your weapon, increase your sprint stamina, add to your health or add to your shield. The intention is to let people play the game as they choose, kind of like an extremely pared-down version of a *Deus Ex* implant system.

So, if you want to be a heavy weapons expert, you can focus on upgrading the rocket launcher. The first upgrade simply makes it more powerful, while the final upgrade gives you multiple spinning, heat-seeking rockets.

You could say it's DE's attempt to add a similar level of interest to weapons as it once did with alt-fire modes in *UT*. The difference is, you have to work for these upgrades – and the better you play, the more options you have to play with.



If you want to be a sniper, a WEC can add heat vision to your rifle.

the coolest thing about the game."

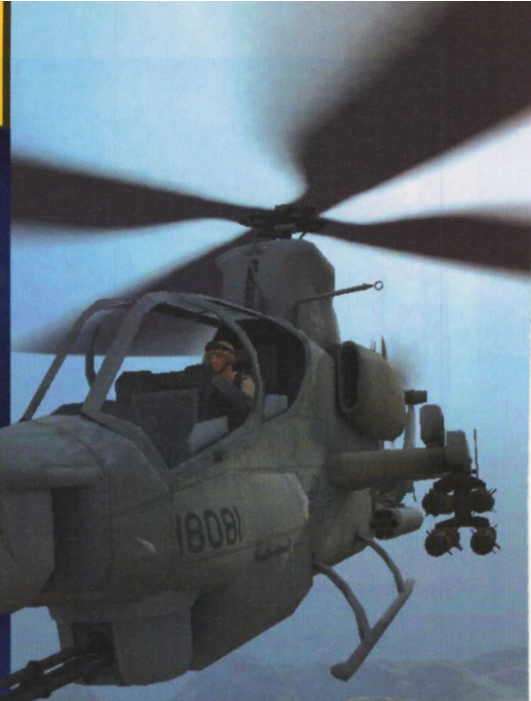
There's no shortage of diversity in the environments either. We're told there's an 80/20 split between outdoor and indoor environments, with everything from rocky plains and dense forests to high-security prison facilities. There's evidence of a talented art team here too, the game displaying a dark and distinctive visual style throughout. Even the enemies, with their hooded faces and menacing eyes, have a subtle appeal to them.

Certainly we're not trying to suggest that *Pariah* is a done deal. *Half-Life 2* has just raised the bar for story-driven action to Himalayan heights, and any game that launches in the next few months is going to have to contend with that. This team, however, unlike so many others who must be wringing their hands in despair right now, remains extremely confident. Look out for a full playtest next month. [E]

★★★
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SHOOTERS

BATTLEFIELD 2



Is this a subtle tribute to *Airwolf*? (No - Ed.)



Play as a lone wolf and you'll miss out on new stuff.

It's a near-future fracas between China, the US and the Middle-East Coalition.

BATTLEFIELD 2

■ Pub: EA | Dev: DICE | www.eagames.com

A battlefield this large requires a new type of leadership. Anthony Holden pulls rank

ETA
 March
 2005

BY DEVELOPER DICE's own estimates, *Desert Combat* (the immensely popular modern warfare mod for *Battlefield 1942*) accounts for around a third of all *Battlefield* games played online. That's a huge slice of the pie by any reckoning, and a pretty strong indication of where player tastes lie. Little wonder then that the forthcoming *Battlefield 2* yanks the action out of its historical furrow and drops it into a

contemporary combined arms conflict – the Middle East.

But there's a lot more to the game than this, as confirmed by a recent hands-on visit to DICE HQ. Aside from a new zone of conflict and hefty graphical makeover, the gameplay has been redesigned throughout, resulting in a host of changes from the barely noticeable to the profound.

At the smaller end of the spectrum for example, there are two new player kits on offer. The Spec Ops man is a demolitions expert laden with C4, while your Support chap is a helpful fellow who doles out packs of ammo.

At the other end of the spectrum, the real meat of the game resides; you've got a vast new player command structure, aiming to create order out of the chaotic *Battlefield* experience.

So, instead of all running around like kids on a cordial high, you're now encouraged to operate in squads. Joining (or creating) a squad is as easy as clicking an icon in the pull-down menu, at which point your buddy names switch colour and your headphones fill with the radio chat from your private voice channel. What's more, pressing the Q key pulls up a radial-style menu (as pioneered by *Raven Shield*), which



They could easily have called it *Desert Combat 2*.



VOIP (Voice Over IP) technology is built in.

SPAWN ON THE RUN

THE SQUAD THAT DIES TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER

Although joining a squad in *Battlefield 2* is purely optional, there are some advantages to doing so. One of the best is that when you die, you can click on your squad leader on the game map and select him as your respawn point. That way, instead of always starting at base again, you can spawn right into the area – or vehicle – occupied by your chums. Not only will this mean a hell of a lot less trudging about looking for action, it also means squads will be able to work together as a coherent unit without worrying about losing key personnel.



An end to spawn camping?



The game still feels like a big military toybox, just a much more organised one.

gives you access to squad commands like 'need pick-up', 'need ammo', etc. Cleverly, these commands are only sent to the relevant people on your squad, in this case chopper pilots and support men respectively.

You also gain access to a basic orders system, by which the team leader can lay down waypoints and objectives on the map, which also appear as heads-up distance counters on screen. Anyone who's played *PlanetSide* or *Joint Ops* will be right at home.

TAKING CHARGE

Of course, squads and squad leaders are one thing, but with up to 100 players causing havoc on a map you still need a steady hand at the helm. To this end, *Battlefield 2* incorporates a Commander mode, which works in a similar way to *Half-Life: Natural Selection* or *Savage*. Basically, one player per team volunteers to be chief, switching to a top-down RTS-style interface and directing squad leaders from on high. With a click, the commander can perform a sweep of the map to see all enemies, as well as zooming in to any area to get a

real-time eye-in-the-sky view. On request, he can drop supply crates, launch air strikes or deploy a UAV – a handy surveillance drone that makes all enemies in the vicinity show up as blips on friendly maps.

Despite all this, the commander is far from omnipotent. Artillery strikes and UAVs are strictly rationed, and have to be specifically requested by troops on the ground. What's more, there's always a counter-measure for commander actions. Artillery, UAVs and spy satellites are all physical objects in the world, meaning the enemy can destroy them and leave your commander weeping in impotent rage.

On the whole, it seems like a really well-balanced system. The commander only gets points based on what points his team gets – he gets no points for kills by an artillery strike – so he's totally motivated to help his team out.

The developer is also keen to point out that the whole structure is purely optional, and it will be quite possible to play the game the old, chaotic way if that's the way you prefer to do it. Though as we discovered when we got a sound whipping from the organised chaps at DICE, working together does have its advantages. **PZ**

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

■ Pub: THQ | Dev: GSC Game World

www.stalker-game.com

ETA
May
2005

It's good to stalk...



The Tate Modern's gone downhill a bit...

STALKER featured in our Biggest Games Of 2004 feature a year ago, and is now surrounded by nearly as much conjecture as fact. In an effort to get a definitive handle on what's going on, we spoke to Oleg Yavorsky of GSC Game World to see what the Ukrainian team have been getting up to.

"*STALKER* is open-ended and provides complete freedom of movement," explains Yavorsky. "We are talking about a huge world of 30 square kilometres. The only restriction will be your poor equipment and armaments early on. Although you're free to pick up and accomplish quests as you go, we felt it necessary to designate a certain path, so we implemented a string of key quests. By following these, you'll progress in the story to finally solve the puzzle of the Zone."

RADIOACTIVE

The setting may have submitted to the call of science fiction, but the weapons

and vehicles have been based on real-life counterparts from the old Soviet Union, and Western guns such as the LR300 rifle. They'll also be modifiable, compatible with different types of ammo, and will even wear out with too much use. With multiplayer, we got to dabble with the deathmatch (which will support up to 32 players), and new modes such as Artefact Hunt (where two teams have to fight it out to get control of the Zone's treasures) are promised. GSC's shooter can definitely talk the talk, but can it stalk the stalk?



Good shot, sir!





Millions of bugs, millions of bullets – it's going to be messy.



STARSHIP TROOPERS

ETA
Q3
2005

■ Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Strangelite | www.strangelite.co.uk

"Bugs, sir! Millions of 'em!"

Sam Kildsen grabs the insecticide

IT MIGHT be seven years since the film hit our screens, but we're finally on the verge of seeing a *Starship Troopers* game that actually might do Paul Verhoeven's mentalist satire-cum-action romp some justice.

While the last PC-based *Starship Troopers* game took the form of a fairly lame RTS back in 2000, Strangelite's upcoming title is a first-person shooter with an eye on recreating the crazed, epic and gore-drenched battles seen in the movie. Set "just after" the events of the film, it casts you as a Marauder, an elite member of the Mobile Infantry fighting the arachnid alien menace.

Most of the levels will be mass battle affairs pitting you and a group of friendly grunts against legions of bugs. And we

do mean legions: Strangelite's custom-designed engine is able to render over 300 scuttling insectoids on screen at once, in addition to troopers, vehicles and artillery. The idea is to let you participate in chaotic, fast-paced skirmishes against an overwhelming number of enemies, all with a distinct cinematic flavour. The movie's memorable Whiskey Outpost siege is one scene that has certainly inspired a mission in the upcoming game: this has you defending the walls first from waves of smaller bugs and later from huge, flame-spitting behemoths. With variety being the spice of life, the developers are also working on a number of solo infiltration-style missions with a stealthier feel.

You'll have to contend with around 20 varieties of bug throughout the game, ranging from the basic Warrior infantry to Blaster Bugs and the hulking, beetle-esque Tankers. Each species will sport its own AI and behaviour: some will rely on sheer weight of numbers to get the job done; others will take to the skies; a small number will be able to unleash sniper style attacks and heavy artillery.

BUG BAITING

Luckily you'll have access to a seriously deadly arsenal. Details on the available hardware are still somewhat sketchy, although you can expect several variants of the Morita assault rifle, a shotgun and (praise be!) some form of mini-nuke. Dropships are on hand to ferry you and the other troopers around, but with Strangelite concentrating on perfecting the ground-based action, you won't get the chance to jump behind the controls.

Your AI comrades cannot be controlled, acting instead in much the

same way as the friendly units from *Call Of Duty*. As a member of the elite, it will fall to you to handle the most powerful, advanced weaponry and undertake the bulk of the nasty jobs. A cooperative multiplayer mode is also planned, allowing you to enlist a few mates before embarking on a post-pub bug hunt.

Visually, *Starship Troopers* is shaping up nicely. Seeing 300-plus spiky arachnids swarming towards you is impressive in itself, but the engine will also incorporate ragdoll physics and normal mapping to give everything a polished sheen.

If work progresses on schedule, the game should make its way into the shops some time in the autumn. In the meantime, watch this space for more info, and never trust Psi-Ops! [E]



Hopefully the satirical humour of the film will not be lost in translation.



Better call the AA.

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

ETA
March
2005■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Crystal Dynamics | www.eidos.co.uk

Big guns, superpowers, big ideas...



DEUS EX

was one of our favourite games ever, still is in fact. And if it had been handled properly we think it could have been one of the biggest cash cows in the industry. Today it's been devalued to the extent that *Project: Snowblind*, originally slated to be set in the *Deus Ex* universe, is seen to have a better chance on its own merits.

The only remaining point of comparison now is that you play as super-soldier Nathan Frost, complete with implanted augmentations that enable you to exploit superpowers like slowing down time, turning invisible and passing through the eye of a needle. (OK, we made one of those up. Slowing down time indeed...)

These same powers provide the only bits of non-linearity in an otherwise fast-paced traditional shooter, so why are we so intrigued? A couple of reasons: first, it's being developed



This is a plasma gun that fries eggs.

by Crystal Dynamics, the team responsible for the sometimes excellent *Legacy of Kain/Soul Reaver* games, as well as the next *Tomb Raider*. Second, we've seen it running and it's showing a level of competence we weren't fully expecting, with innovative dual-fire weapons that could prove especially interesting in multiplayer. Expect the likes of shotguns that also lay sticky bombs (hilarious when attached to enemies) and flamethrowers that dish up mines that attack when an enemy comes into proximity. You can combine weapons for extra effect and there's also a full range of vehicles you can control.

It might not ooze the class of *F.E.A.R.* or the visual pull of anything powered by the soon-to-be-unleashed Unreal Engine 3.0, but it's still one to watch.



And this is a rifle that grates cheese.

REPUBLIC COMMANDO

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: LucasArts | www.lucasarts.com

You're never alone when you're a clone...

ETA
March
2005

THERE'S NO shortage of squad-based shooters on the market, but to date, most of them have followed a very strict template. Real-world military milieus, accurate weapons and tactics, typical hostage/terrorist/siege scenarios. As a result, they've all started to become indistinguishable, and often rather dull.

Republic Commando, the first ever squad-based *Star Wars* shooter, should change all that. It's a military-style affair with a four-man squad and a host of tactical options, but the sci-fi setting gives it an unusual amount of freedom, and the developers have taken full advantage of this.

Crucially, they've reinvented the way you give orders to your squad-mates, introducing an elegant one-touch system that, while far from realistic, is both fast and intuitive. Now, instead of wrangling with waypoints and command menus, you use a single 'use' key to perform a squad manoeuvre. Simply click on a world object, such as a door, a wall or a computer terminal, and you'll see a ghost-image of a squad-mate (or mates) performing a context-sensitive operation. Press F to confirm, and your squad will do

that action, whether it's taking up a sniping post, hacking a computer or performing a coordinated door breach.

More general commands like 'search and destroy' or 'secure area' are handled with the function keys, which, in conjunction with highly autonomous squad AI, give you all the tools you need to effectively police the republic.

With the additional benefits of Unreal-powered graphics and a raft of uniquely *Star Wars* scenarios, *Republic Commando* could be the freshest and most exciting squad-based shooter in years.



That armour must chafe...

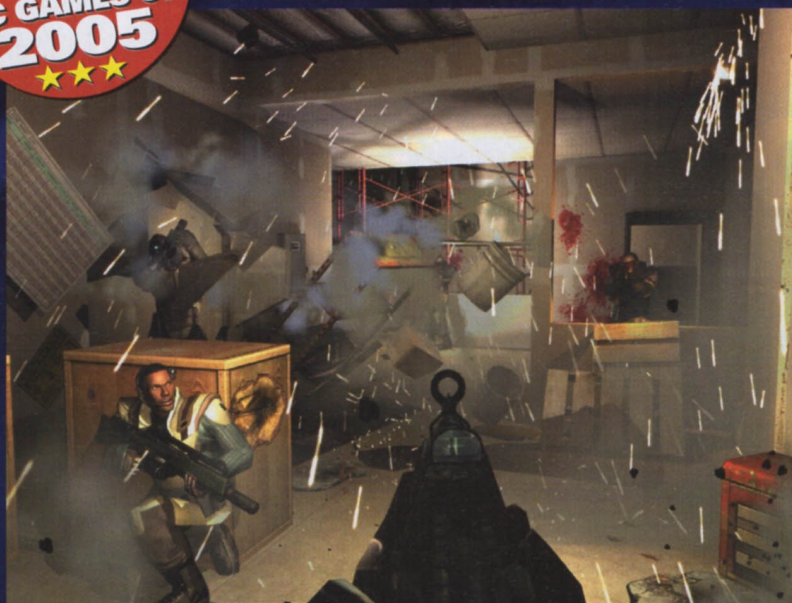
Makes *Jedi Academy* look like kids' stuff.

Giving orders is incredibly simple.

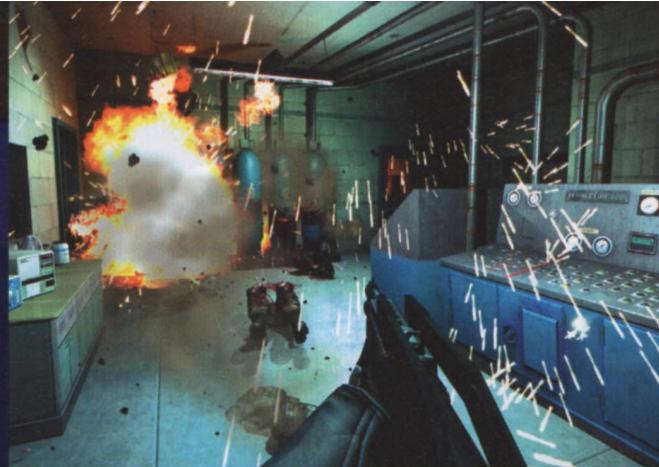
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SHOOTERS

F.E.A.R.
 DARK SECTOR



The janitor's going to go ballistic when he sees this mess.



F.E.A.R.

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Monolith | www.liith.com

Be a-fear'd. Be very a-fear'd...

IF YOU WERE lucky enough to nab a copy of last month's *PC ZONE* before they sold out (in approximately 23 minutes), you'll know everything you need to know about the shooter that combines Asian horror, close-quarters combat and Monolith know-how to create a game that's going to knock seven shades of shit out of you.

A trifle premature to be making such declarations? For any other magazine,

possibly, but we're the only journalists who've been allowed in to play the game and we can say that it rocks such big bells we had to wear huge earmuffs to get through it unscathed.

The plot is still under wraps (and don't expect to get much more on it until the game ships – it's the big hook), but all you really need to know is that you play as a member of F.E.A.R., a paranormal Special Forces outfit sent

to investigate the aftermath of a grisly massacre.

Cinematic pacing and narrative are Monolith's buzzwords and the game is set to juxtapose huge action sequences, where it's you against supremely intelligent squad-based AI, with frights aplenty. Not forgetting the small scary girl in a scary red dress. From the team that's already hit with *AvP 2*, *NOLF 2* and *Tron 2.0*, expect big, big things.

ETA
 June
 2005

DARK SECTOR

■ Pub: TBC | Dev: Digital Extremes | www.darksector.com

The next generation of games starts right here

DIGITAL EXTREMES, creator of *Unreal* and the *UT* series, has a dark secret. It's a third-person stealth-action game set in a bleak cyberpunk future and from the exclusive sneak peeks we've been given it looks frankly magnificent.

Unfortunately *Dark Sector*, one of only a few games confirmed for the next generation of graphics technology, is still being fought over by the heavyweights of games publishing, and until a victor emerges we can only give you sketchy details. For one, the game is set in space, in the mysterious realms at the edge of the solar system, where you play a high-tech stealth agent with a host of supernatural powers. The tagline for the game is "every generation a few are born with the power to control," which is

not only a sly hint as to the developer's intentions, but a key to the gameplay itself. Using a combination of cyber-implants and psychic skills, you'll be able to manipulate time, the environment and computer systems in a variety of cool ways, giving you a huge amount of control over a highly reactive world.

Dark Sector not only looks stunning, it also exudes cool from every digitally rendered pore, with an anime-inspired art direction that will leave cyber-geeks in tears. The latest news from DE is that the game has just reached its first playable prototype – a major milestone that could suggest a Christmas 2005 release. And though nothing more will be revealed until early spring, this game is definitely one of the brighter points on the gaming horizon.



Dark Sector is thought to be aiming at Xbox 2 and 64-bit PCs.

ETA
 TBC
 2005

QUAKE IV

ETA
TBC

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Raven | www.ravensoft.com



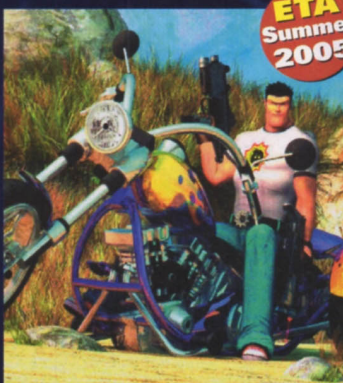
It's been too long since we felt the gentle purr of a railgun in our arms.

WITH A continuation of the story of *Quake II* coupled with the railgun-toting insanity of *Quake III* multiplayer on the way, even the most hardened of game journo's are finding their mouse-hands getting peculiarly sweaty. Developed by Raven, overseen by id and pumping a full range of vehicles and outdoor environments into the *Doom 3* engine, *Quake IV* is set to ditch the

horror and launch you into a war of intense action and aliens who enhance themselves with the flesh of their enemy. There are still plenty of missing details (specifically in multiplayer), but there's everything to hope for in what is one of the most important sequels of the year. Plus, you'll eventually end up turning into a Strogg yourself, which should be worth the price of entry alone...

SERIOUS SAM 2

■ Pub: Take 2 | Dev: Croteam | www.croteam.com



ETA
Summer
2005

BOASTING a magnificent engine that out-Doomed *Doom*, *Serious Sam* was an old-school shooter that blew us away. For a few hours until the repetition kicked in that is, and we tossed the game into a cupboard never to see the light of day again. Since then, Croteam has been beaver away on a sequel, and though no screenshots have been released we have managed to glean a few gobbets of info.

The game uses the *Serious 2* engine, which promises to be 100 times more complex than the original. If you're

interested in the new techniques *Serious Sam 2* is going to incorporate you can check the website for regular updates and if you understand anything posted there you can award yourself a medal. Apparently "hierarchical visibility determination using visibility groups is now functional." Well thank f*** for that.

You can also expect to battle up to 35 enemy types across 30 levels in seven unique environments. Getting them off the number train for a second, the only other info we were able to trick the developers into spilling was that the game will introduce vehicles that "both Sam and his enemies can use." (The image above may be a hint.) Expect the carnage to begin again in the summer.



BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

■ Pub: Atari | Dev: Deep Shadows | www.deep-shadows.com

ETA
Spring
2005



In parts of South America this is considered a friendly greeting.

WE WERE surprised at just how ambitious *Boiling Point* was when we were first shown the preview code in issue 149, a game that can almost be described as *Grand Theft Auto: South America*. A massive and seamless world, a freeform mission structure and adult themes are all on the agenda.

"*Boiling Point* will feature very strong synthetic adrenaline and alcohol

which will play an important role in our world," explained senior producer Thomas Schaefer. "Having a glass of tequila in a South American bar can sometimes open mouths. On the other hand it will make a big difference if you decide to help the Mafia by dealing in adrenaline, although others in the world may not like this. Remember, the CIA is also featured in *Boiling Point*..."

BET ON SOLDIER

■ Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Kylotonn | www.betonsoldier.com

ETA
May
2005

BIZARRE TITLE, bizarre concept, but one that sounds cunningly original. Set in a war-torn future, major corporations have got their teeth into the conflict by running a book on the outcome of duels between gladiator-style soldiers. A novel line-up of weapons is promised, including a five-barrelled shotgun, which all have to be purchased with your winnings. All it needs is a virtual John McCrick to commentate. And be shot at...



VIVISECTOR: BEAST INSIDE

■ Pub: Brigades | Dev: Action Forms | www.vivisector.com

ETA
Early
2005

MAD DOCTOR

exiled to an island for horrific experiments on animals. Man with guns sent in 100 years later to battle against fierce cyber-animals.

No prizes for story then, but this Ukrainian FPS at least grabs an honourable mention for riling the Home Counties,

with news that a new physics system allows you to "shoot out individual lumps of flesh." Hooray.

Set for an early 2005 release, the game looks reasonably competent, although the latest news from the website reads, "All Action Forms workers are on Independence Square. We're going to protect our president Victor Yushenko and our right to live in free democratic country." Rumours they've taken their Elaborated Rams to help the cause are unconfirmed.

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STRATEGY EMPIRE EARTH II



"Ooooooh! Aaaaaah!"



Civilisations include the Greeks, British, Chinese and the Aztecs.

EMPIRE EARTH II

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Mad Doc | www.empireearth.com

Everybody wants to rule the world...
Including **Richie Shoemaker**

ETA
Q1
2005

EMPIRE EARTH wasn't a perfect game, but it was the first real attempt to meld the *Civilization* concept with that of real-time strategy. The idea was to distil the entire breadth of humanity's past, present and future into a range of thrilling storylines, and it was successful enough to ensure the commissioning of a sequel.

Surprisingly Stainless Steel (home of Rick Goodman, lead designer of *Age Of Empires* and the original *Empire Earth*) has not been involved in its making,

leaving development in the hands of Mad Doc Software – the guys who made *Star Trek Armada II*. Thankfully, Mad Doc is no stranger to the *Empire Earth* experience, and one game in its past provides

more than a glimmer of hope: *The Art Of Conquest*, *Empire Earth*'s one and only expansion pack. Contrary to the rule that all add-ons should be inferior to their parent, this managed to rack up an impressive 84 per cent in this very magazine. Rest easy epoch-spanning RTS fans, it appears the right people are on the job after all...

SEE HEAR

"By listening to feedback from players of the first game and its expansion," says Ian Lane Davis, Mad Doc's CEO, founder and figurehead, "we learned that whilst players loved its epic nature, they wanted new command and control features to facilitate playing such a big game. Now the player has an unprecedented ability to smoothly control large empires."

By way of example, 'Mad Doc' Davis puts up a number of gameplay innovations

that look set to impress far more than the updated 3D visuals. "We've really done a great deal of work. In general, we kept the things that made *Empire Earth* a great game (core RTS gameplay and epic scope) while moving the franchise along. We're implementing advanced AI, enhanced environmental realism – with weather, seasons – new multiplayer modes, and improved management systems with an all-new engine. In the end, *Empire Earth II* is a really strong step forward for the franchise, as well as for the RTS genre in general."

MIND GAMES

The core group of new features are designed to allow easy management of the AI and the game in general. For example, the Citizen Manager allows you to make sure your civilians are working in the right place at the right time. It appears by setting up priorities geared towards gathering resources for war or for economic prosperity. By and large, you can then leave your civilian population to get on with the dirty work. Similarly the new War Planning feature will allow you to call up a regional map



Diplomatic treaties are available...

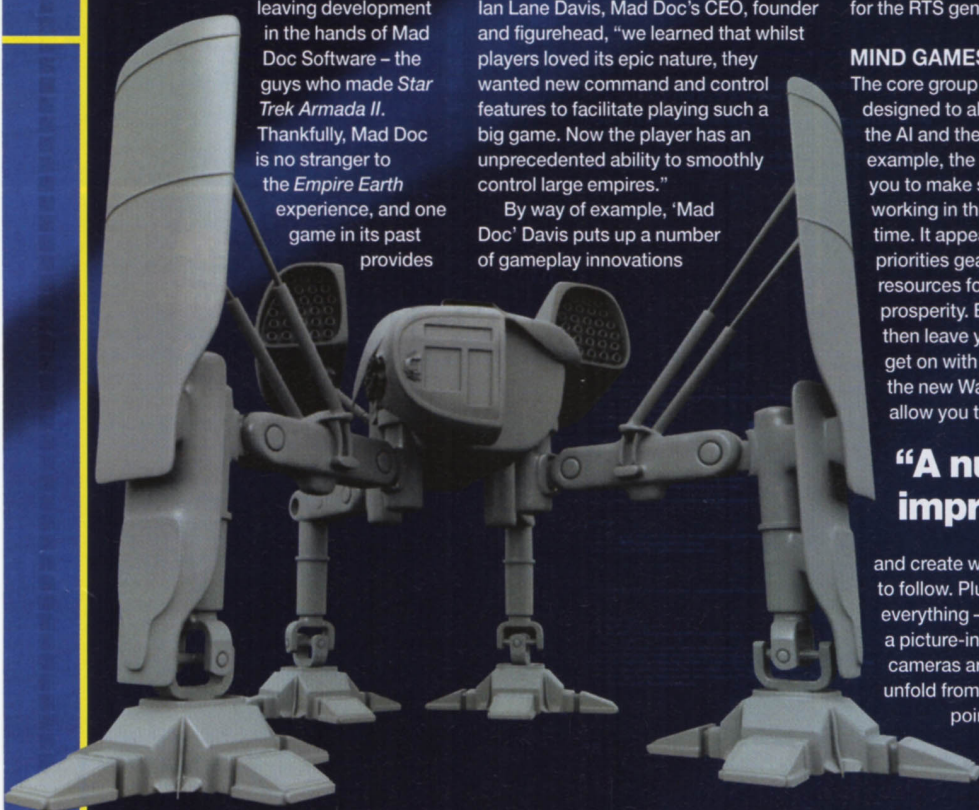
what Davis proudly proclaims as "non-cheating AI".

"You should also keep in mind that with *Empire Earth II*, there'll be bigger

"A number of gameplay innovations impress more than the 3D visuals"

and create war plans for allied troops to follow. Plus you can follow everything – Mad Doc has instigated a picture-in-picture feature, where cameras are set up to watch events unfold from important vantage points and perhaps witness

battles over many ages, and hardcore gamers can expect adaptive, more dynamic AI to give them challenges that seem more human. We did this by simply knowing more about AI than any other developer. I've worked on about a dozen strategy games, and I have a PhD

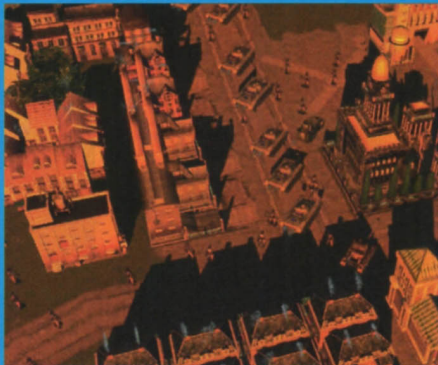


YOU AND WHOSE ARMY?

A RUSH AND A PUSH AND THE LAND IS OURS

Each map in *EEII* is divided up into a number of territories, which will either be rich in natural resources or have strategic value. To claim a territory, a city centre must be built before any other buildings or units can be produced there. Of course, expansion has its hazards as resources become overstretched, as does consolidation, which lends greater weight to the economic and diplomatic options in the game.

"Territories can influence your movements as well," adds Ian Lane Davis. "If you have an alliance with another player, it may specify that you don't have border permission, and in this case, you may be prohibited from moving civilian units, military units or both types on to their territory. The whole idea here is to make the game more real, more interesting."



City centres: great for expansion. And shopping.



in Robotics (AI). Let's be realistic here. AI for an RTS game is a hard problem – an extremely hard problem – which is why so many people take too many shortcuts. But it's not an absolutely impossible problem, and we know how to solve it better than anyone else."

CORE CONTINGENCY

The core *Empire Earth* concept is unchanged, the aim being to conquer each map – whether it be in a skirmish battle or over the course of the three linear campaigns (a Korean campaign covering the early epochs, a German series of missions that spans the 19th and 20th centuries and an American campaign that scoots happily into the future). All told the game covers 12,000 years of human history – some of it unwritten – divided into 15 epochs, with 14 playable races and close to 350

different units, some of which will be unique to each race – a lack of which was a criticism of the original game.

More of the same, then? Not according to the wacky physician in charge of things. "In the end, *EEII* is different from its predecessor in a lot of ways. It's a game designed to appeal to casual gamers, while offering advanced players more depth and strategy to keep them enthralled. The two aren't mutually exclusive. I really believe that *Empire Earth II* is definitely a game that appeals to everyone – but not at the expense of the hardcore faithful."

Mad Doc's goal to give players more, while making it easier to digest and control, appears to be on target. *Empire Earth II* is shaping up to be an elegant sequel, with enough innovative gameplay to keep any strategist happily occupied for 2005 and beyond. [A]



Unique units include M16 agents & ninjas.



Weather conditions can affect your units.



Early motorbike prototypes were a resounding failure.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

THREE SIMS 2 EXPANSION PACKS
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **1/673**
ROME: TOTAL WAR EXPANSION
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **1/2**
SIM CITY 5
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **15/1**
RISE OF NATIONS 2
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **25/1**
C&C TIBERIAN TWILIGHT
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **50/1**
GROUND CONTROL 3
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: **300/1**



Lay off the booze, you chimp.



BLACK & WHITE 2

■ Pub: EA | Dev: Black & White Studios | www2.bwgame.com

Martin Korda finds out the development process of Molyneux's latest is anything but black and white...

ETA
2005

IT'S BEEN a few months since we last caught up with one of the most ambitious games currently in development – RTS/god game *Black & White 2* – and as you're about to find out, much has changed and evolved since we last paid it a visit.

For starters, Black & White Studios has totally revamped the game's graphics engine. "The creature's technology employs such things as hair that gets burnt or wet. He can grow from a tiny little guy to a giant monster, his looks change with his alignment and he gets fatter or thinner depending on eating habits," explains Ron Millar, B&W2's lead designer.

But what of the Black & White Studios' promises to also make the world around you reflect your chosen alignment, be it good, neutral or evil?

"If you're evil, then the very ground around you will crack open and grow thorns, while flowers, grass and trees will wither and die. But if you're good, then flowers spring up, trees blossom and life seems to spring from every nook and cranny," comes Ron's reply.

WHAT'S INSIDE

But B&W2's advances aren't all about the aesthetics. Oh no, not by a long shot. As you may have read in the Lionhead Diaries a few issues ago, B&W2 has

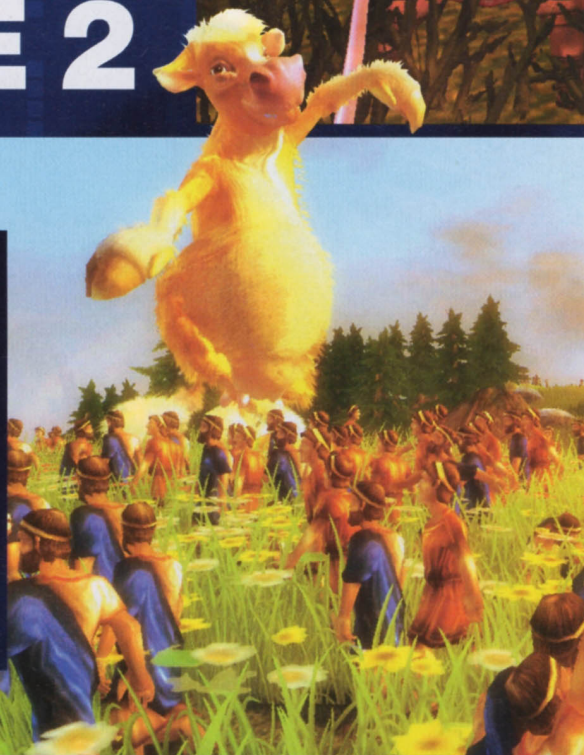


Er, guys, your houses are on fire.

recently gone through some radical changes. This is particularly true now the team has decided to do away with the game's multiplayer options (though Ron hopes online options will be added further down the line), in order to concentrate on making the single-player game as deep, compelling and entertaining as possible.

One of B&W2's major selling points is its epic battles between the armies of good and evil, including open warfare, siege battles and most exciting of all, armies led by 50ft high creatures.

"The armies are being developed to capture the sort of combat and force of



Now that's a lot of steaks.

impact that you'd expect to see in a major Hollywood film," promises Ron.

And then there's your creature, which is promising to be infinitely more useful than it was in the first game, as well as much easier to understand and influence. "Your creature is essentially your friend and ally that you teach and nurture or beat and abuse in order to have him do your bidding," explains Ron. "In *Black & White 2*, your creature acts depending on how you play. If

you're a good god and a city builder, he helps you out, defends your city and entertains your villagers. If you're an evil god and a warmonger, the creature acts as your most powerful unit, leading armies into battle. Play as a more neutral god and the creature does a bit of both."

UNDER CONTROL

"One of the biggest complaints from *Black & White* was that it was hard to teach your creature something. He

SPELLING TEST

NOW THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO SPELL A MIRACLE

Not content with redesigning half the game, Black & White Studios has also had a careful look at the game's Spell and Miracle casting options. And as if you couldn't have guessed, these are being revamped too. "We're redesigning the spells in order to make them more unique and useful, especially in combination with themselves and other elements of the game," explains Ron.

"Even casting methods are being looked at. What I'd like to achieve is having each spell cast in three different ways. Take a fireball for example: you can throw it, pour it like molten lava or spray it, flamethrower-style. You can imagine how that might apply to lightning." We sure can Ron, and we like what we're imagining.



Right now I'd be running away. Very quickly.

would go to the toilet on a field and by the time you'd congratulated or punished him, he'd done something else like eaten a villager. Now there's a creature 'mind interface' that enables you to go back into the recent past and, using a simple drag-and-drop interface, tell him what you think is good or bad," says Ron. And as if all of that wasn't enough, you'll also be able to tell what your creature is thinking and feeling thanks to some still under-wraps innovations that enables you to quickly and easily discover exactly what mood your creature's in.

Ron was sadly unable to tell us much about all of the game's other

innovations, except that the control interface is set to be far more streamlined and intuitive than before, meaning you can learn how to play the whole game simply from the feedback you receive while playing. Sounds intriguing.

Clearly, Black & White Studios has been feverishly busy over the past year. The downside of all this innovating though, is that it looks like we're still going to have to wait a fair while for the finished product. However, even if only half of these innovations are successfully implemented in the final reckoning, then waiting is something we're more than happy to do. [E]



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"The Buccaneer M is a striking piece of machinery - a sleek silver case bearing an enamelled Lan Pirates logo and an extremely bright 15.4" WXGA widescreen."

"..we cannot heap enough praise upon it's lightweight (but solid) construction, the comfortable, positive keyboard and long battery life."

"Performance is stellar for a notebook of this price..."

47/50

Quotes from Xequated.com Review



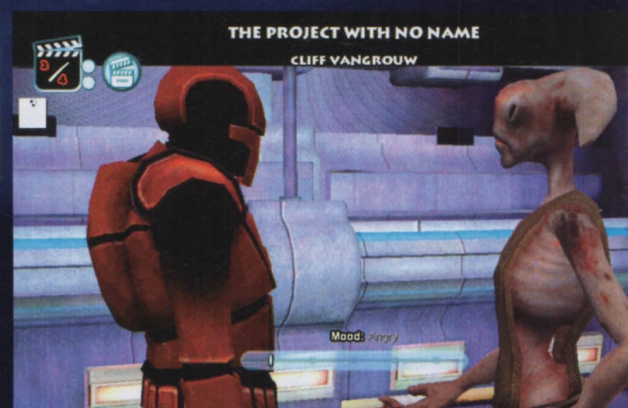


THE MOVIES

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Lionhead Studios | www.themoviesgame.com

Martin Korda discovers you don't need to live in LA and have 50 million dollars to make a movie

ETA
TBA
2005



Hopefully you'll come up with a better title for your film.



Lead a movie production company through over a century of filmmaking.

IF YOU'VE ever walked out of a movie seething with unbridled anger that you've just forked out the best part of a tenner for two hours of vacuous rubbish, then *The Movies* could be just the thing you've been looking for.

The game sees you taking control of a film production company between the early 1900s and 2010, and allows you to make your very own films, though as lead designer Adrian Moore explains, these won't always be full length. "To play the game you need to make mini movies that are 2-10 minutes long, but if you're just interested in making films then you can make full-length movies."

Since we last caught up with the project, *The Movies* has made some pretty major advances, especially in the graphics department. "Our biggest advance in the last year has been a facial animation system for the actors, which means they can convey emotion as they act their scenes," says Adrian.

"We also now have a full 3D engine

which allows the player to zoom right into ground level and experience life in their studio, plus a new lighting engine that creates some great shadow effects." A quick glance at the screenshots on these pages confirms just how much progress the team has made in a relatively short space of time, with sets and characters now featuring a far more lifelike look and feel that'll add enormously to the believability of your movies.

ACTION!

But how will the movie creation process fit into the game's wider gaming mechanic, in which you have to run every aspect of a film studio? "You can have as much or as little freedom as you choose," states Adrian. "If you want to focus on other areas you can simply commission a script, green light it and the movie is made without any input from you. But there is the facility for the player to control every single aspect of

AGE CONCERN

NOW NOT EVEN VIRTUAL ACTORS CAN ESCAPE THE RAVAGES OF AGE

Plastic surgery. Botox injections. Nivea Visage. Paper bag over the head. The actors in *The Movies* may well have to resort to all four at some point in their careers thanks to the implementation of *Black & White 2*'s creature aging technology into *The Movies*, which will see the game's stars change and age with every passing year.

"Our artists have created a database of 50 different male and female heads. You can mix each head with any other to create a truly unique face," explains 3D programmer Jean-Claude Cottier.

"The artists have also created an aged version of each generic head, meaning we can age any of our faces automatically by using a linear blend between the young texture and the old one. Wrinkles form, liver spots appear and skin tone fades. We also make the eyes look older – less shiny and cataracts start to form – and their teeth become more yellow."

Add lip-synching to the mix and a full array of facial expressions and you're looking at some of the most lifelike characters every seen in a game. Throw in a splash of incontinence and a bit of dementia and the vision will be complete.



The characters in *The Movies* are full of life. Until they get old that is.

the filmmaking process if that is what they want to do. It depends on whether you're making films to win the game or for your own pleasure."

With the freedom to convincingly realise your visions and create celluloid masterpieces (or teen horror movies), you'll also have the chance to test your acting (in)ability by adding your own dialogue. And thanks to another newly

"Your recorded dialogue is lip-synched perfectly by each actor"

implemented feature, your recorded words will be lip-synched perfectly by each actor.

SETTING UP

But all that's just for starters, as Adrian claims that *The Movies* will also feature some highly advanced AI that'll allow your actors to intelligently interact with their sets. "Actors will always behave in an appropriate manner to the setting they're in, so if you put them on a rooftop set they'll jump from roof to roof, put them in a bar and they'll play cards or brawl, and put them in a bedroom and well, I'm sure you can imagine that," Adrian explains.

"They also learn from experience so if you continually cast them in horror films they'll get better and better at that genre."

Your actors will also rack up experience every time they rehearse or are cast in a film, though some will be more temperamental than others. As such, you can expect to see hissy fits and flying Evian bottles as overpaid luvvies storm off to their

trailers mid-shoot because they can't find their motivation, or turn up half-cut with talcum powder spread liberally over their nostrils. Wait a minute, that's not talcum powder...

We've been excited by the prospect of *The Movies* for quite a while now, but with all of these improvements and innovations hopefully embellishing what was already looking like a potential blockbuster, our expectations have risen yet further. Just think, in a few short months, you may never have to fork out ten quid to watch a bad film again. Oh no – you'll be able to make an even worse one in the comfort of your own home instead. [E]



Every unit is made from spare parts...

EARTH 2160

■ Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Reality Pump |
www.earth2160.com

NOT CONTENT with having destroyed the world in *Earth 2140* and *2150*, the war moves on to a newly discovered earth-like planet in 2160.

Project leader Mirek Dymek spoke to us about what you can expect from the latest instalment in the popular RTS series. "*Earth 2160* uses the all-new Earth 4 engine, which features real-time material generation, dynamic lighting and shadowing, reflective surfaces, water, global and local fogging and on-screen dynamic effects," he explains.

"At the beginning, you can choose from two campaigns, though there are four playable factions in all," continues Mirek. He also assures us that an advanced alien race will make an appearance during the course of the non-linear campaign, though he was unable to tell us more at this time.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the game is the ability to design and construct units and even buildings from modular components, opening up a huge range of possibilities. *Earth 2160* looks like it could be a major advancement on its predecessors, and possibly one of the dark horses of strategy gaming in 2005.



STRATEGY

HEART OF EMPIRE

■ Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Deep Red | www.deepsilver.de



From the chaps who did *Beach Life*.

AND WHAT empire might that be? Why, it's arguably the greatest of them all – Rome. With *Heart of Empire*, you'll be able to knock up your own Roman city with, hopefully, the greatest of ease. It won't be all managing buildings and infrastructure though, as you'll have the added bonus of a 3D engine that'll let you zoom right in to watch the individual actions of your city's inhabitants marching along your roads which, presumably, all lead to Rome.

WILL OF STEEL

■ Pub: GMX | Dev: Gameyus | www.gmxmedia.net/willofsteel



You play as William Steel. Seriously.

NO, NOT Porter's new *City Of Heroes* character, but a new RTS from GMX Media. Set during the conflicts of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, *WoS* is set to feature voice control functionality that'll let you bark orders at your troops like a crazed Sergeant-Major. Although multiplayer has yet to be confirmed, and the jury's still out on how useful the voice control will actually be, *WoS* looks like it's shaping up to be a solid modern-day war game.

PCZONE
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2005

STRATEGY

COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE | ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION



ETA
Q2
2005

COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Pyro | www.commandosstrikeforce.com

Richie Shoemaker sneaks behind enemy lines as Pyro goes for a frontal assault...

COMMANDOS IS going 3D. Not only that, but Pyro is taking away the select-and-direct interface and supplanting one that's unapologetically point-and-shoot as the hard-as-nails WWII puzzler turns FPS in its fourth outing on PC.

"With *Commandos 3*, we closed a cycle," says Íñigo Vinós, Pyro's communications manager. "Making a *Commandos 4* could have started to feel like more of the same. We also wanted to make *Strike Force* a first-person shooter so that we could take it to the console world, and the best way to do this is through an action game."

While the dreaded words 'console port' ring in our elitist ears, it's worth pointing out that *Commandos: Strike Force* won't be just any old FPS where you're forced to furrow a lonesome path to glory. Rather, much like the isometric games, you have a team of specialists to call upon as once again you fight to bring down the Third Reich from behind the lines.

The cast list has been cut down significantly, with only three characters now playable. These are the Green Beret, a sniper and the spy, each of whom offers obvious specialist skills. Sadly, there's no recall for the faithful hound from *Commandos 2*, which would have provided some levity as we piss down the trouser legs of German sentries. "Characters will be controlled directly by the player – you see the action in first-person, with the exception of some third-person camera shots for dramatic effect," adds Vinós.

As is its way, Pyro is being very guarded about how the game will play, although it's keen to stress that *Strike Force* will be unique from the likes of *Full Spectrum Warrior* which impressed us on PC, despite its roots on lesser machines. However, as the bandwagon moves on to more modern conflicts, the biggest danger for *Commandos* may be more chronological than technical. Only time will tell.



The game uses the ubiquitous RenderWare engine



Commandos: Strike Force – the new C&C Renaissance

ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION

■ Pub: Atari | Dev: Eugen Systems | www.eugensystems.com



The plot revolves around a 'clandestine consortium of energy companies taking over the world's natural resources'.



ETA
Q1
2005

EUGEN SYSTEMS is going for the treble. After picking up an 'Essential' award for its last game *The Gladiators* and a 'Pants' for *Times Of Conflict*, the French outfit is hoping to bring home the big one for its next strategy effort *Act Of War*.

It could do it too – the game has a techno-thriller plot penned by best-selling author Dale Brown, a heady mix of contemporary and near-future military units (among them drones, personal weapons platforms and stealth tanks), along with a graphics engine that promises to blow *Command & Conquer: Generals* out of the water.

More importantly, Eugen plans to introduce a system of 'human resource management', which means extracting wounded troops, rescuing pilots and capturing enemy soldiers rather than butchering them in some field.



First *Hitman*, now this. That Billy Corgan gets everywhere.

IMPERIAL GLORY

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Pyro | www.imperialglory.com

Rome has laid down the gauntlet, but Pyro is dreaming of its own impending glory...



Battles rage across Europe and the Middle East.

PYRO STUDIOS, responsible for *Praetorians* and the *Commandos* franchise (see left) is understandably quite excited about its forthcoming strategy project *Imperial Glory*. Although Spain's premier developer is dismissive of any comparisons between *Imperial Glory* and The Creative Assembly's magnificent *Rome: Total War*, it clearly has plans to ambush the RTS superpower before it can gather its troops for an expansion pack. *Imperial Glory* presents a glorious technicolour Napoleon-era strategy romp with detailed troops going at each other with state-of-the-art (at this time in history) muskets and cannons.

"To be honest," says Pyro's communications manager Íñigo Vinós, "I don't think *Imperial Glory* will improve the (*Total War*) formula – it's a different composition. I think that *Rome* improves *Medieval*, and *Medieval* improves *Shogun*, but *Imperial Glory* is on a different line."

The line being referred to is of course a historical timeline, for *Imperial Glory* is set squarely during a period when established European empires were squabbling over new and old world alike. Although the game features a now

familiar blend of turn-based campaigning and real-time 3D, the major difference is that rather than sword and arrow, the currency of carnage here is lead shot and shrapnel, fired across both land and sea.

Unlike *Rome*, *Imperial Glory*'s turn-based campaign will be set across strictly-bordered regions (à la *Shogun*/*Medieval*), which may seem a regressive step after sampling *Rome*'s more tactical method of grand warfare. However, it appears Pyro is aiming to provide a faster-paced game, where tactical prowess and technical innovation are more important facets of leadership than managing a civilian population. "Some people like *Civilization* more than *Age Of Empires*," says Vinós, presumably meaning *Total War* can be likened to the former and *Imperial Glory* the latter.

Whatever the outcome of the forthcoming battle, Pyro is on target to release the game before the spring – and the team is currently tweaking the AI and balancing the units and strategies of the five playable nations. Hopefully, we'll have more play of the preview code in next issue – which should give you just enough time to sit down and conquer *Rome* a second time...

"Imperial Glory presents a glorious technicolour Napoleon-era strategy romp"

IMPERIAL GLORY | CC: FIRST TO FIGHT | UFO: AFTERSHOCK

STRATEGY

UFO: AFTERSHOCK

■ Pub: Cenega | Dev: Altar | www.ufo-aftershock.com



ETA
Spring
2005

Always obey Stop signs.

THE SPIRITUAL successor to *X-Com*, the turn-based sci-fi strategy/RPG *UFO: Aftermath* was a veritable hit on release, grasping a *PC ZONE* 'Essential' award in late 2003. Since then, Altar has been busy working on the sequel *UFO: Aftershock*, set 20 years after the events in *Aftermath*, with a brand-new plot involving (more) scheming aliens,

new units, improved AI, better base and resource-building and much-improved 3D graphics. Despite publisher Cenega being up for sale, we hope to have a full play of this promising title very soon.



CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT

■ Pub: Global Star Software/Take 2 | Dev: Destineer
www.firsttofight.com



ETA
Late
January

It's an 'imaginary' near-future conflict in Lebanon. Citizens of Beirut, flee now!

DID YOU LIKE *Full Spectrum Warrior*? Want more, but with proper first-person action? Then *Close Combat: First To Fight* could be your new favourite game. Made to exacting standards of (slightly airbrushed) reality with the aid of 40 active-duty US marines, *F2F* is a squad-based military shooter set in Beirut. All the trappings of tactical urban combat are here, except with better-than-average AI and a detailed morale model. Wannabe soldiers apply here.

★★★
PCZONE
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2005
★★★

STRATEGY

COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS, SILENT HUNTER III, PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

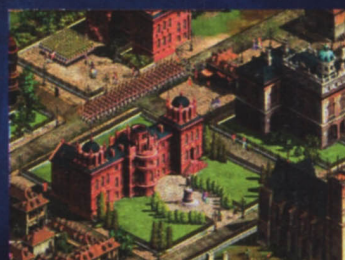


COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS

■ Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: GSC Game World | www.cossacks2.com

It's the game Ural waiting for...

ETA
Mid-Feb
2005



When village fêtes go wrong...

THE LONG-AWAITED

follow-up to 2000's surprise RTS hit appears to be every bit the sequel we expected, with just the right amount of interface tweaking and graphical polish to appease hardcore faithful and newcomer alike.

Although stopping short of creating a fully 3D game, GSC Game World has made efforts to compensate by offering to populate its vast trademark maps with up to 64,000 troops, all of which can be seen and controlled on one screen using the new 'L-mode' feature (press L to zoom out).

"We've implemented the global map of Europe, which is divided into nations' territories," says GSC Game World's Oleg Yavorsky, "and those are, in turn, split into sectors which the player must

fight for. It's up to the player which of the sectors to attack or whether to attack at all. Basically the campaign in *Cossacks II* provides for a truly non-linear experience, where it's entirely up to you, what to undertake at any moment, and which methods you use for victory."

OK, so it's no *Total War*, but for armchair generals who prefer to battle the enemy rather than a camera, *Cossack II*'s could be amongst the biggest and easiest wars to direct, not to mention the most dynamic. Vive la France!

SILENT HUNTER III

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft | www.silent-hunteriii.com



ETA
Q1
2005

Nazis: we hate those guys.

Sink this to win big prizes!

FOR THE latest in the venerable sub sim series, Ubisoft has recruited a penfull of Romanian games designers, programmers and artists and has pretty much left them to get on with it. The results could be impressive, for as well as the usual engine room improvements, one new feature that's sure to add a new human dimension to the proceedings is the 3D crew members – who'll nod, wink and whistle in tune with your orders. Along with dynamic campaigns, we're quietly hoping SS3 will set a new standard in aquatic warfare.

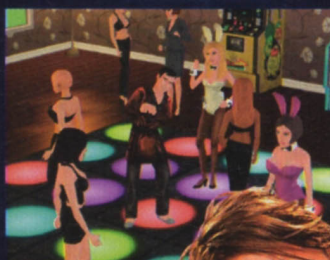
PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Arush
www.playboythemansion.com

ETA
March
2005

WE WERE never expecting *Playboy: The Mansion* to be a masterpiece, but we've just played preview code and the latest abuse 'em

up is looking fairly entertaining, if in a base and very basic way. Playing Heff, you have to build your magazine and mansion up from humble beginnings to a porn paradise by shooting centerfolds (with a camera), throwing parties and wowing celebs. It's not going to challenge *The Sims*, but you can bury your face in silicone-enhanced breasts in front of other party guests, and we can't help but admire it for that.





"So, where's this party then?"



ETA
Feb
2005

THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Blue Byte | www.thesettlers.com

The pioneering RTS gets a 3D update. Richie Shoemaker tries on the emperor's new clothes

THE CUTESY visuals may have been discarded in favour of a more traditional fantasy/medieval style, but this latest *Settlers* title appears to be anything but ordinary, as Blue Byte strives to take the decade-old RTS series into the third dimension.

Apart from offering characters with near average-sized heads and allowing you to swoop the camera around them to appreciate their new polygon togs, *Heritage Of Kings* aims to push into new territory by offering a far more evolved combat system than ever before. Traditionally, *Settlers*' gameplay has been geared more towards resource management and city building, with war-mongering often not quite as refined as in similarly themed games. However, with a diverse spread of combat units (including some with 'near-magical' abilities) and plenty of army formations to try out against the enemy, we're hoping that *Heritage Of Kings* will offer a more varied and exciting experience.

SETTLING UP

Blue Byte won't be deserting its faithful fans. Underneath the grittier visuals a highly technical economic engine will be beating, but with a streamlined interface centred on the needs of the settlers themselves rather than some wider 'notion of economy. Each individual will have their own unique skills to unlock



Grimsby, through beer goggles.

should you succeed in fulfilling their needs. To that end, the design brief may well have been ask not what your settlers can do for you, but what you can do for your settlers.

In a nod to games like *SpellForce*, *Heritage Of Kings* will be the first game in the series to offer a full storyline, with you playing as one of six unique hero characters with the ultimate aim to reclaim a throne that is rightfully yours. Obviously it's a storyline that will transfer to the multiplayer game without too much trouble, only instead of one rightful heir, there will be a few more claiming royal lineage.

KING FOR A DAY

The list of structures and units is typically exhaustive for a *Settlers* game,



There's nothing like coming home to a real fire.

with buildings as obvious as farms and as diverse as sulphur mines and weather towers. More mobile are the usual mix of swordsmen, cavalry and bowmen, but back at base you'll have to manage scholars, bricklayers, stonemasons, alchemists, farmers and bankers as you work your way through the branching technology tree to advance your civilisation.

Having been in development for over three years and with a 3D engine that will

facilitate vast maps, cities and warring armies, as well as providing a host of new tools with which to build and conquer, Blue Byte might have finally found a delicate balance of gameplay – and one that may well appeal to anyone with a fondness for strategy titles as diverse as *Warcraft* and *Sim City*. As such, we remain optimistic that *Heritage Of Kings* will be a princely RTS – watch out for the exclusive review and playable demo next month. **PC**

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2005

DRIVING

GRAND THEFT AUTO:
SAN ANDREAS



CJ impresses the girls on his BMX.



"We plough the motherf***ing fields and scatter..."

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

ETA
TBA
2005

■ Pub: Rockstar | Dev: Rockstar North | www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas

Rebel without a pause **Jamie Sefton** checks out Rockstar's latest mofo

WASSUP HOMIES! *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is the latest, and possibly the greatest, of Rockstar's infamous crim sims. However, unlike the previous 3D excursions into Liberty City and Vice City, *San Andreas* is actually a whole state – basically a parody of California – that includes the three huge cities of Los Santos (Los Angeles), San Fierro (San Francisco) and Las Venturas (Las Vegas), plus acres of hillbilly, banjo-plucking countryside in between.

Set in the early 1990s, *GTA: San Andreas* follows the fortunes of Carl Johnson, who returns to his old, run-down 'hood in Los Santos after hearing that his mum has died. CJ must first earn respect from his local gang, joining up and completing missions such as robbing an army base, nabbing explosives from a moving train and popping a cap into rival gang members.

BLING!

Rockstar North – never a developer to shirk from inserting brave new ideas into *GTA* – has excelled this time with, wait for it, role-playing game elements. Now obviously we're not talking about shields, goblin magic and wizard hats (God forbid), but you do have a host of stats such as respect, stamina, muscle and sex appeal. The latter will be affected by the clothes, tattoos, hair and jewellery you buy, for example (all available in various stores), and any physical attributes will be affected by diet. Yep, CJ has to eat at certain points, and if you only scoff at fast food restaurants like the Cluckin' Bell chicken restaurant, you'll end up with a flabby body only a big mama would love. So, unless you want to keep getting busted – even by donut-eating cops – you'll have to go running or haul your fat ass down the gym to burn it all off.

San Andreas has some tasty new vehicles to jack including a BMX bike, a very sleek low-rider car (that can be tilted in all directions), a tractor, a locomotive and – get this – CJ can even parachute or base jump from buildings! Almost too cool. You can now also swim (no more sad, drowning episodes), talk to pedestrians, play coin-op videogames in the arcades and even gamble in the casinos of Las Venturas. Rockstar North has even added an element of stealth, so you can sneak up on people to slice

them from behind – useful when completing goon-heavy missions and burgling houses for loot.

HIPPETY-HOPPETY

There's more. Probably even more exciting is the prospect of two-player missions, where you and a mate can choose a character and go on a killing spree, then kiss each other – just like Bonnie and Clyde. Rockstar is keeping the plans for its PC conversion of *GTA: San Andreas* close to its hairy, gold medallion-wearing chest, but we're quietly hoping for online versions of the multiplayer mini-games for more than just two players. In any case, with its licensed radio stations pumping out Public Enemy, Faith No More, The Stone Roses and Cypress Hill, plus another A-list Hollywood cast including Samuel L Jackson, Peter Fonda, Shaun Ryder and Axl Rose, *GTA: San Andreas* is da bizniz. Word. Ahem. **PC**



TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE

■ Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Nadeo | www.trackmaniagame.com

The French shareware racer sees daylight, and eats dust and words

ETA
April
2005

"I TAKE IT all back Will. You were right. You were right." What was that, Steve Hill? Let's rewind. "You were right." Really? You've seen *Sunrise*, have you? Let's hear it again, I've forgotten what we're talking about. "I take it all back Will. You were right."

Victory! Sweet victory! *TrackMania: Sunrise* is set to be the best thing on four wheels, and no one can mutter inane (and wrong) comments about French shareware because it's quite frankly beautiful, and so

fast it'll make your eyes water. Obviously there'll be all the same track-building puzzles, time trials and intense multiplayer competition as before – but the cars are sexier (ie not stupid trucks), they fly far higher and, most importantly, the opening jingle to every race has remained exactly the same.

New details that have leaked out of Nadeo include a vastly revamped track design system, custom paint jobs on your cars, and skin-able billboards and

buildings – but what'll turn the *TrackMania* cynics among you is simply watching it in motion. Never has a game made such an evolutionary leap from edition to edition – if *Colin McRae* had a makeover of these proportions then it would be throwing real mud in your face.

Anyway, in summary, oh hang on... What? What was that? "I take it all back Will. You were right. You were right." Christ Steve, stop going on about it...



No crash detection, but still no worries.



"I take it all back Will. You were right"

Big slow trucks are out and sleek penis extensions are firmly in.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

| | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| COLIN MCRAE 6 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 1-1 |
| TOCA 3 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 2-1 |
| DRIV3R | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 10-1 |
| GRAND PRIX 5 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 1000-1 |

MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3

■ Pub: THQ | Dev: Climax | www.thq.com

The fastest game on two wheels skids onto PC for a third lap of honour

ETA
Q2
2005

LAST YEAR'S *MotoGP 2* was the definitive motorbike game, providing an intoxicating petrol-sniffing package of bikes, riders, tracks and gorgeous TV-style replays. Weighed down with numerous gaming awards for its efforts, developer Climax is already gearing up for the sequel, which should take the chequered flag towards the end of this year.

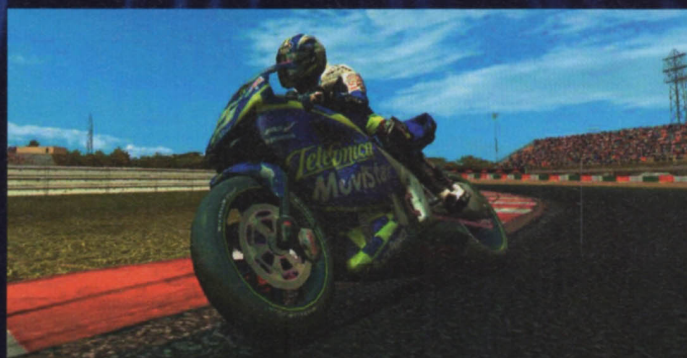
Although info is as light as a Kawasaki sub-frame, all the great gameplay from the previous two titles will be lining up on the grid, including an addictive career mode, that allows you to choose your own leathers and helmet, and has RPG-like stats such as cornering and acceleration to improve.



MotoGP 3

also promises to include the hugely popular Stunt mode, that encourages you to perform wheelies and knock off other riders (à la *Road Rash*), a host of multiplayer options for LAN and online, plus a "brand new mode" yet to be revealed. Of course, being an officially licensed game, there'll also be the full roster of riders and courses from the 2003 MotoGP World Championship, which you can pore over using the excellent replay facilities, which will be enhanced with the latest DX9 graphics effects.

We'll hopefully be burning rubber soon with a full hands-on – watch out Valentino Rossi...



Are two wheels better than four? You can find out soon.



There'll still be a third-person view so you can admire your shiny armour.



Some of the prettiest graphics we've seen.

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

■ Pub: TBA | Dev: Bethesda Softworks | www.elderscrolls.com

Bored with real life? Then follow Sam Kiildsen into Oblivion

ETA
TBA
2005



Half-man, half-bull. All scary.

FOLLOWING in the celebrated footsteps of *Arena*, *Daggerfall* and *Morrowind* comes *Oblivion*, the fourth full-scale instalment in Bethesda Softworks' long-running *Elder Scrolls* series, and the developer's most ambitious project to date.

Set in the Imperial heartland of Cyrodiil rather than a backwoods colonial province like *Morrowind*, the game's plot concerns the assassination of an Emperor, an amulet of great power and the opening of a dimensional portal to Oblivion, the titular underworld of Tamriel and home to legions of nasty beasts. The gateway

unbolted, these demonic denizens are free to pour forth into the real world and cause all manner of mischief. With a release date still some way off, the developers are reluctant to reveal any more of the storyline, although it's clear that you will be venturing into the hellish realm of Oblivion at some point and that (as with all *Elder Scrolls* games) you'll be starting the game as a prisoner.

LEAP OF FAITH

Bethesda is hoping to build upon the massive success of 2002's *Morrowind* by fine-tuning, tweaking and ultimately perfecting the open-ended RPG style that has become the series' trademark. So, while you'll still be role-playing, brawling, spellcasting and thieving your way across a gigantic game world, you can expect a sackful of new and improved features when the release date finally rolls around. In fact, in the words of Bethesda big cheese Todd Howard, "You can look at the changes we made from *Daggerfall* to *Morrowind* and expect a similar jump from *Morrowind* to *Oblivion*."

For starters, *Morrowind*'s unrefined, click-heavy combat is out, with the development team working on a far more thrilling system based on accurately timed attacks, the use of skill-based special moves and the addition of satisfyingly visceral consequences like accurate blood spray and bone-crunching sound effects. Behind-the-scenes dice rolling is kept to a minimum





Morrowind fans can drool over a new collection of swords.

"Pixel-shading wizardry will be lavished on almost every surface"

in this new action-packed approach, which might upset the RPG purists a touch, but they can take some comfort in the fact that your character's stats will come into play when calculating damage.

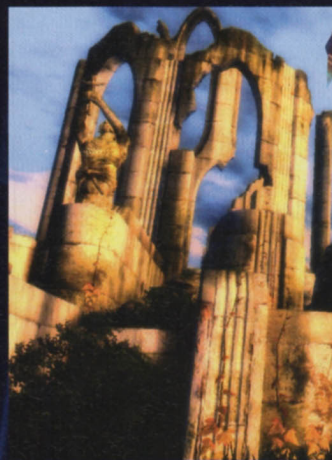
A PIECE OF THE FACTION

The rather rudimentary AI in *Morrowind* is being replaced with the far more dynamic Radiant system (see 'You're Looking Radiant Today,' below), while Bethesda also promises that an improved journal, NPC hints and maps will help you keep on track when it comes to completing missions. Of course, as with other *Elder Scrolls* titles, you are free to take a laid back approach to the main quest should you wish, and there will be plenty of things to get up to on the side. Like *Morrowind*, there are several guilds and factions operating in *Oblivion*; these will include the Thieves Guild, Mages Guild, Fighters Guild and the shadowy hired killers known as the Dark Brotherhood. "You can join all of these," says Howard. "Our game is about becoming this other character in this fantasy world, and the factions almost act as an entire game unto themselves for each character archetype to play in. We're trying to make each faction have its own story, perks and rewards for finishing."

But what about the physical size of the world that you'll actually be living in? *Morrowind* boasted a play area so big that getting yourself lost in the wilds

became a real possibility. "*Oblivion*'s big," says Howard. "In some areas it's bigger than *Morrowind*, in some it's not. I think scale is hard to describe." It seems that there will be less NPCs wandering the land – some 1,000 to *Morrowind*'s 2,500 – but that they will have more interesting stuff to say and do. "Our tools allow us to create so much content that size isn't our concern," Todd continues. "The game always ends up too big! We're more focused on the quality of the interactions we're building."

If you've already feasted your eyes on the accompanying screenshots, then you'll know that *Oblivion* is shaping up to be one of the finest-



Tamriel builders aren't what they used to be.



"Excuse me, have you seen the Horn of Gondor?"

looking titles ever to grace the PC. Just like *Morrowind* before it, *Oblivion* will make liberal use of pixel-shading wizardry, but this time it'll be lavished on almost every surface rather than just the odd bit of water.

GIVE US WOOD(S)

All the shots you see here are in-game, and Bethesda claims the final product will look even lovelier, courtesy of a number of yet to be added visual effects. The screenshots also

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

DEUS EX 3

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: 750/1

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT 2

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: 750/1

BALDUR'S GATE 3

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: 750/1

suggest that the developer is shunning the widespread brownness associated with *Morrowind*'s environments and embracing a more 'green and pleasant land' feel for Cyrodiil. Technical jiggery-pokery should also allow for the rendering of immense view distances and huge forests; the latter is something that's never really been done well in a 3D game (unsurprising given the sheer processing power required to draw hundreds of thousands of leaves), so we await the results eagerly.

In fact, although the game is still a fair old way from completion, we can hardly wait to cast off our everyday trappings and head off into the wonderful world of Tamriel once more. Keep your eyes glued here for further details. [E]

YOU'RE LOOKING RADIANT TODAY...

AND I'LL HELP MYSELF TO SOME OF THAT, THANK YOU

Great as it was, *Morrowind* wasn't above criticism, and one chief moan was the lifelessness of the NPCs. Day or night, rain or shine, the game's inhabitants would simply be stood in the same place all the time, reacting to nothing except the player and the odd wandering monster. Bethesda has addressed this in the sequel with the rather nifty-sounding Radiant AI system, which invests Cyrodiil's citizens with daily cycles (sleeping, working etc.) as well as wants and needs.

If an NPC feels peckish, for instance, then he'll go looking for a bite to eat. If he sees you wandering by, he doesn't like you much, and he's the violent type, well... he may well try and obtain some of your grub. Using something pointy.

Providing Bethesda can pull it off properly, it might just be the ideal way to breathe real life into *Oblivion*'s gorgeous environments.

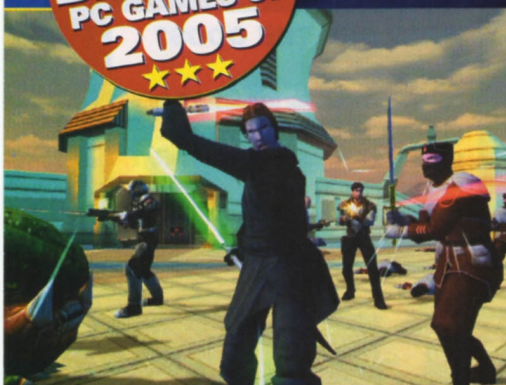


A quasi-medieval table, yesterday.

★★★
PCZONE
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2005
★★★

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II:
THE SITH LORDS



Kiss goodbye to your social life...



It looks the same, but who cares? It's *KOTOR*!



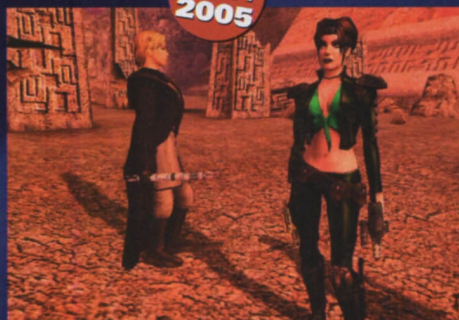
Monsters are bigger and there's more of them.

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Obsidian | www.lucasarts.com/games/swkotor_sithlords/

KOTOR almost cost Will Porter his job and his girlfriend.
This time it's going to be even worse...

ETA
Feb 11
2005



Now that's some light show.

KOTOR: now with real jedi robes.

BAD THINGS happened in *KOTOR*, but your rag-tag bunch of space drop-outs and rogues always made it seem like a pretty jolly adventure – dark-side inclinations aside. What's more is that while you were falling back to inject yourself with some adrenal stimulant or plotting a nifty Force Kill, you always knew that you had two other jedi's (unless you were mad and took Mission and Zaalbar) to rely on for healing and battle heroics.

No more! No longer! You're the last known jedi in the universe, you're all alone and you're almost dead. In addition, you've lost your memory, you won't be given a lightsaber until you're hours into the game, and pretty much everywhere you go you're relentlessly hunted by an insidious enemy. *KOTOR 2* is dark, and specifically designed to

make you feel mistrustful, uneasy and continually endangered – it's been said many times before, but this is *KOTOR*'s *Empire Strikes Back*.

DARK JEDI

Not much has been changed bar a few (fairly considerable) engine tweaks and an upgraded system that means you can switch attack patterns without delving deep into menu screens. However, perhaps the biggest change will come in the depth and complexity that can be found in your interactions with the world around you. It's promised that this time around, your decisions will have far greater impact, will invariably be more gut-wrenching and should swing the opinions of your party to an extent that's likely to impact on your gameplay much more than they did before.

Aside from Carth's grumbling and Bastila's haughtiness, you knew you could invariably count on your sidekicks in the original game. This time round though, they've got their own agendas and are far more likely to act in self-serving ways and prompt disharmony in your ranks. Among the malcontents are

a wise old woman with one hand, a sultry handmaiden, a technical fellow with a home-made repair droid and the re-appearing and perennially plucky security-breaking bot T3-M4. HK47 also turns up, although primarily sitting in a heap in the Ebon Hawk's cargo hold dishing out droll 'statements' until he's restored enough to tell you what terrible fate befell the ship's previous inhabitants.

PLANET-HOPPING

Location-wise, you'll be revisiting Dantooine and Korriban (where you previously discovered the rival schools of the Jedi and Sith academies), Telos (the home planet of Carth Onasi), the Mining Planet of Onderon and its moon Dxum and the Mandalorian World (Boo! Hiss!) of Malachor V.

It'll be a strong PC gamer who manages to block out all the info from the Xbox release, but all the signs are pointing towards *The Sith Lords* being an RPG classic. It's a star-studded roster at Obsidian and we've every faith that when you're reunited with your lightsaber, you'll be taken on an action-packed journey that you'll probably end up telling your grandchildren about... [E]



A winter wonderland. With a liberal sprinkling of blood.



Beware the big pointy sticks of doom.

DUNGEON SIEGE II

ETA
Q4
2005■ Pub: Gas Powered Games | Dev: Microsoft | www.gaspowered.com/ds2**Rhianna Pratchett doesn't care about a party's atmosphere, just as long as it has lots of sharp weaponry**

DUNGEON SIEGE is certainly a rather strange choice for a game-to-film licence, primarily because the original game didn't have much of a story in the first place. Yet despite this, there are not one, but two *Dungeon Siege* films being penned under the consulting eye of Chris

Taylor. But while I remain sceptical about just how long *LOTR* fallout is going to give audiences an appetite for sword 'n' sorcery flicks, I'm much more confident that Gas Powered Games' own sequel will satisfy RPG-action fans the world over.

DO THE RIGHT THING

Much of the reason for this confidence is that *Dungeon Siege II*'s developer hasn't been too precious about its first game, and has been very matter-of-fact about what worked well and what didn't. Unsurprisingly, creating a more story-driven game has been top of its list of priorities, as the anorexic offering for the original game was one of the main aspects fans wanted to see addressed in the sequel. "We've integrated our story closely with a series of primary and secondary quests in *DS2*," explains lead designer Kevin Lambert. "You'll have party members with personal agendas, an epic tale with a deep, rich context and a storyline that's tightly woven into the gameplay experience."

Sounds good to me, but what *Dungeon Siege* did so right was in creating a very sublime party-fighting system, and that's something that

shouldn't be changed for love nor money. Thankfully, Gas Powered Games see things the same way and the things that have been changed, or rather 'polished', only add to what the original had already established.

HAPPY TREE FRIENDS

One of the ways in which Gas Powered Games has improved on the party system is by adding in skill trees to give you more choice in the disciplines of your characters. "They give you more options for customising characters, more choices to make during combat, and the satisfaction of doing some serious damage when it really counts," emphasises Kevin.

So you've got your trees, but what you really need is some plump and juicy abilities to rain down upon your hapless enemies. Kevin explains that these fruits of righteous ass-kicking come in the

form of hero powers, which are gained as you level up your characters. "They provide an additional layer of moment-to-moment decision-making and excitement to the game. You can use them alone or in combination with other party members' powers to turn the tides of battle, but powers take time to recharge, so using them strategically yields the biggest advantage."

Bolstering your party members will be pets, such as elementals. Unlike the rather hapless pack mules, these guys fight right beside you. They also level up by consuming items, which neatly deals with that age-old role-playing problem of item and inventory juggling.

While not being vastly different from the original, *Dungeon Siege II* does seem to have all its tweaks in the right places. We'll bring you more news soon, before the plastic swords and action-figures take over... [X]



Between a rock and a hard place.



There's never a house-sized fly-swatter around when you need one.

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ROLE-PLAYING

CALL OF CTHULHU
DRAGONSHARD | BIOSHOCK



ETA
Q1
2005

CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

■ Pub: Bethesda | Dev: Headfirst Productions |
www.callofcthulhu.com

Will Porter knows all about the call of nature and the call of the wild, but he can't even pronounce *Call Of Cthulhu*

THE NOBLE goth is a lot like the chaffinch and the gazelle, in that even though they all look the same there's a surprising array of sub-species within their number. For every 14 year old who likes Slipknot and hangs around in multi-storey car parks, for example, there's an aging, bedraggled, gangly fellow with a love for the works of H. P. Lovecraft.

It's the latter we're interested in here though, because *Dark Corners Of The Earth* is a first-person adventure based on the dark imaginings of the very same horror auteur. "The game opens with the player character, Jack Walters, attempting to take his own life in an insane asylum," explains Dennis Cheng, the game's producer. "The game then jumps to six years prior, with a fresh faced Jack being blissfully unaware of the Mythos, investigating a disturbance at a house in Boston, Massachusetts, involving an unusual cult. Jack discovers something in the basement of that house not of this world, something that pushes him beyond the limits of both his understanding and mental balance."

The main game takes place in the weeks that lead up to his eventual suicide. It's February 1922 and (plagued by severe amnesia and psychosis) the terrors he witnessed back in Boston slowly start to unravel. "A new client, Arthur Anderson, asks him to visit Innsmouth, to investigate a missing store clerk," continues Dennis. "A little research uncovers rumours of strange creatures and unholy rituals, of the town's unexplained prosperity, and the

recent disappearances in the area. During the course of the game the player will not only uncover the secret history of Innsmouth, but also gradually unveil the horrors of his own past."

Spooky, eh? Essentially this means *Call Of Cthulhu* will go big on the scary monsters, and even bigger on the psychological damage. Insanity effects will actually play a large part in the gameplay, much as it did in the under-rated GameCube shit 'em up *Eternal Darkness*, with hallucinations, dizziness, vertigo, sound hallucinations and shaking all making Jack's life an outright misery. "If Jack is put into a state of panic, the user will find that their controls have suddenly become extra sensitive," explains our man at Headfirst.

Whether or not all the flashes, bangs, smoke and mirrors come down on the right side of annoying we're yet to see, but in terms of design and heritage *Call Of Cthulhu* is certainly an interesting proposition. We're not reaching for the trenchcoat just yet though.



The misery of life before PC games.

DRAGONSHARD

■ Pub: Atari | Dev: Liquid Entertainment |
www.atari.com/dragonshard

ETA
Q1
2005



Experience earned below decks makes a difference on the battlefield above.

AS MUCH as we'd like to deny it, PC gaming owes a huge debt to Dungeons & Dragons, and those shameful bonds aren't ready to loosen just yet. The latest game to drop out of the matted facial hair of tabletop D&D is *Dragonshard*, an innovative RTS in the works at Liquid Entertainment.

Rather than trying to blend strategy and role-playing elements like so many recent efforts, *Dragonshard* essentially

does both at the same time. At ground level it's a traditional RTS, with base-building, resources and massed ranks of cavalry and infantry. Take your 'hero' units underground, however, and the game reverts to a dungeon bash in the finest *Baldur's Gate* tradition.

It's certainly a novel approach to the D&D universe, and one that could provide the best of both worlds without compromising either.

BIOSHOCK

■ Pub: TBA | Dev: Irrational Games
www.irrational-games.com

ETA
TBA



These boys know how to create a tense horror environment. We want more.

NOT A HUGE amount of information has filtered down from Irrational on the game that would be *System Shock 3* – although we're hugely excited about its promises of bio-engineered monsters, an ecology of AI behaviours and instincts and the

ability to blend your own DNA with that of the beasts whose paths you cross. To this day *System Shock 2* remains one of the most influential and thrilling games that the PC ZONE staff have ever played. To say we're intrigued would be an understatement.

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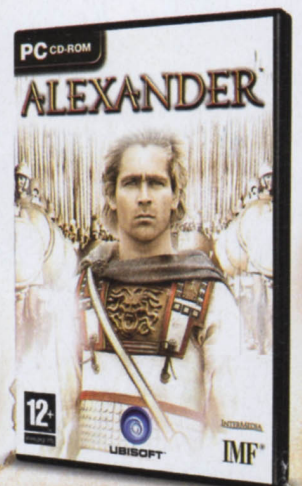
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ACTION/ADVENTURE

SPLINTER CELL:
CHAOS THEORY



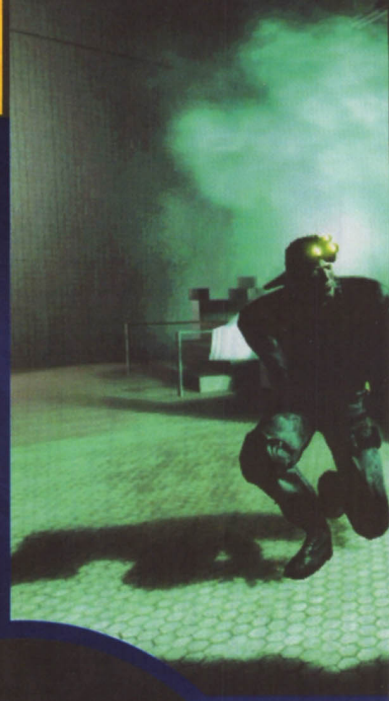
The stealth meter now has separate gauges for light and sound.

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft Montreal | www.splintercell3.com

Anthony Holden looks forward to the day
when chaos reigns supreme

ETA
March
2005



In one mission, Sam will have to rob a bank as a diversion.

"One of the strong focuses of *Chaos Theory* is proximity," says producer Mathieu Ferland. "The game is all about strong emotions from being closer to danger, and we've created a lot of new moves that translate that idea. We really like the neck snap move, where Sam is upside down, hanging with his feet and twisting the neck of an enemy below."

The game also restores the blade to its rightful prominence, enabling you to hold hostages at knifepoint (although not to kill them). What's more, with the new material properties in place, you can even slice through a tent wall or rice paper screen and dispose of an enemy where he sleeps. Beautiful.

GRAND UNIFIED THEORY

Of course, this is but one triumph in a game that promises many wondrous things. *Chaos Theory* has been in development for over two years now – the true sequel to 2003's stealth masterpiece – and from what we've seen it's going to be utterly magnificent. As

THE PUREST and most basic pleasure of the stealth game is without doubt the silent kill. That exquisite satisfaction of taking an enemy unawares, dispatching him with a modest splash of claret and escaping back to the refuge of darkness without the slightest hint of public disturbance. Over the years, this pleasure has been obscured by guns and gadgets and hybrid shooter atrocities with no appreciation of the ninja mentality. But fear not, because *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* is about to set things straight, taking the genre back to its roots with a renewed emphasis on silent kills and dispatches of the most devious kind.



THE PERFECT WEAPON

EVERY GADGET GETS A POLISH IN *SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY*

While there's no shortage of new features in *Chaos Theory*, all the existing tools of the trade are getting a full makeover as well. Take the sticky cam, for example. This used to be a bit of a gimmick that you'd have a go with when you got bored of doing split jumps. Now, the sticky cam will be a crucial surveillance tool. Not only will you be able to leave them in place and switch back to them at any point, you'll be able to deploy multiple cams and swap between them at will. (Which is how they should have been in the first place, but handy nonetheless.)

Likewise, your humble SC 5.7 Pistol. Once used primarily for shooting light bulbs, it now comes fitted with an Optically Channelled Potentiator or OCP, used to make electronic devices (including lights) go berserk for a few seconds.

Minor weaponry tweaks you might say, but hopefully they'll all add up to the perfect stealth experience.



Hitching the game to the Unreal wagon has paid dividends – it looks superb.

game over. Instead, your mission priorities simply shift – now your primary goal is to prevent the terrorists from escaping and retrieve whatever information they gleaned from the late professor.

Secondary and tertiary objectives also play a part, rising and falling in significance according to what's going in the mission. "*Chaos Theory* is definitely less linear than the original," says Mathieu. "We wanted to remove unexpected game-over situations and other trial and error gameplay. You'll have a great deal more freedom to play the game the way you want to."

ON THE BALL

A crucial prerequisite to this non-linear gameplay was building an AI system that could cope with its hefty demands. As a result, *Chaos Theory*'s enemies promise to be among the best and most adaptive in the business, making the dumbed-down grunts of *Pandora Tomorrow* look like lobotomy jobs.

NPCs now respond realistically to all manner of suspicious stimulus, be it broken glass from a light bulb, other guards disappearing, lights going out or unexpected noises. When their suspicions are aroused they'll call for back-up, use flares to illuminate shadows, initiate search patterns and set up barricades. Even the AI systems that were fudged in previous episodes – like the hiding and finding of bodies – now work in a true and honest fashion.

"A lot of work has been done on the AI in order to assure the most realistic reactions possible," agrees Mathieu. "We've added new layers of awareness for NPCs, and they'll now remember when something goes wrong. Moreover, NPCs' voices will make a big difference, since their generic reactions have eight times the variety of previous titles."

To be perfectly honest, *Chaos Theory* looks staggeringly good. The March release date is now mere weeks away, and should confirm once and for all that this is the only stealth series worth knowing about. [A]

"The AI promises to be the most adaptive in the business, making the dumbed-down grunts of *Pandora Tomorrow* look like lobotomy jobs"

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

| | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| TOMB RAIDER 7 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 2-1 |
| METAL GEAR SOLID 3: | |
| SNAKE EATER | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 3-1 |
| SAM & MAX 2 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 5-1 |
| THE SUFFERING 2 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 10-1 |
| FALLOUT 3 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 50-1 |
| MONKEY ISLAND 5 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 500-1 |
| THIEF 4/DEUS EX 3 | |
| ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: | 1000-1 |

STOLEN

■ Pub: Hip Games
Dev: Blue 52
www.blue52.co.uk

THIEF MEETS *Alias* is how a dribbling simpleton might describe *Stolen*, a UK-bred sneak 'em up starring a high-tech lady thief. The game features all the classic hallmarks of the genre, including an array of unlikely gadgets, some even less probable gymnastic feats and room upon room of somnambulist security guards.

Unlike other so-called sneak 'em ups, *Stolen* puts the focus very much on silent, sneaky interventions, as you're forbidden from killing anyone through the entire game. As such, your most hostile weapon is a stun-dart, forcing you to stay in the shadows and plan every move with precision.

From what we've seen the game is looking fairly intriguing, though we fear its console graphics and generic gameplay may let it down in the face of *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, currently slated for the same approximate release date.



Aspiring burglars take note(s).

★★★
PCZONE
PRESENTS THE
BIGGEST
PC GAMES OF
2005
★★★

ACTION/ADVENTURE

LEGO STAR WARS
KING KONG | HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY



Natalie Portman must be flattered at the likeness.



Every drop of rain is made of tiny bricks. Which must hurt.

LEGO STAR WARS

ETA
April
2005

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Giant Interactive Entertainment/Traveller's Tales | www.legostarwarsgame.com

Quite possibly the most powerful kids' game in the universe

"LEGO Darth Vader?" "Yes. My yellow-faced master." "Rise." Cue dramatic music, smoke and a rising black, plastic face – with a smiling lego gurn buried deep inside it. Can words express how exciting the prospect of Anakin's fall to the Dark Side is? Will anybody be able to console us when it (perhaps inevitably) turns out to be rubbish?

Never mind though, because *Lego Star Wars* is set to make it all better. A game that allows you to fight through all the exciting bits of the prequels, only with everything made of Danish plastic, it's an inordinately fun third-person, multi-character jaunt that'll put a smile on even the most curmudgeonly of faces. As you progress through the game using the Force to reconstruct broken lego bridges and slicing droids into little lego chunks, you unlock more and more playable characters until you have a cast of 30 knights and villains (including Yoda, R2-D2, Padmé and the like).

There'll also be a huge assortment of vehicles (all of which break into lego chunks when destroyed) that includes Naboo fighters, pod racers, speeder bikes and (hopefully) Anakin's custom proto-TIE Fighter from *Episode III*. It's a kids game, obviously, but when we first saw it a couple of months ago we were smitten – and the fact that there's a drop in/drop out two player mode that recalls the heady days of *Golden Axe*, well that just seals the deal.



The Empire will be bricking it when they see this...

The Force is what binds the galaxy. That, and plastic nodules.

KING KONG

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft Montpellier/Ubisoft Montreal | www.ubi.com

ETA
Q4
2005

WHY THE hell should anyone give a monkeys (ha ha) about a *King Kong* game? Well, in normal circumstances you wouldn't – and seeing as the Peter Jackson movie remains somewhat of an unknown quantity there's no real reason why you should.

Thing is, the Ubisoft Montpellier team behind the sublime *Beyond Good & Evil* is in charge. So could we have here a commercially viable adventure with all the same brilliance, charm and daring gameplay as green-lipped Jade's? Please. Dear God please.



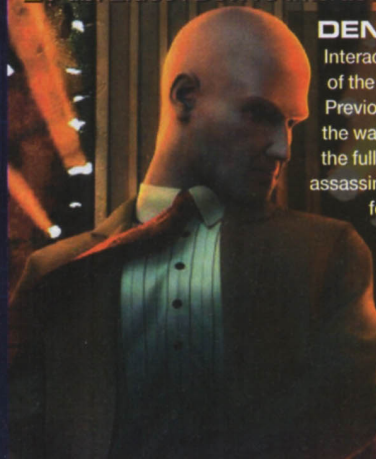
PCZ artist's impression of what the game may well look like.

70 PCZONE

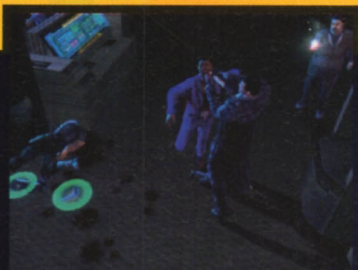
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: IO Interactive | www.hitman.com

ETA
Q1
2005



DENMARK'S finest development house, IO Interactive, is busily putting the meat onto the bones of the bald-headed contract killer's fourth adventure. Previously the *Hitman* games have dipped toes into the waters of dubious morality, but never quite taken the full plunge. With a fully-rounded plot about rival assassins, political intrigue and a more freeform setting for your murderous antics (your agency is out of the picture and you're operating by yourself), plus an updated 'Glacier' engine boasting AI that's surprising even the developers, *Blood Money* might finally be the *Hitman* game that wins over the masses.



Torture (apparently) can be fun.



Sickest game ever? Quite possibly.

THE PUNISHER

■ Pub: THQ | Dev: Volition | thq.com/punisher

LAST YEAR'S movie of lesser-known Marvel comic creation *The Punisher* fell short of the unprecedented levels of gore and brutality its source material promised, but that's not a mistake Volition intend to make with their forthcoming *Punisher* game. A Max Payne-style 3D action shooter, *The Punisher's* most notable feature promises to be the variety of diabolical means of torturing and dispatching the naughty people.

"You can decide how hard you slug criminals, how close you bring the

blowtorch to their faces, and how far over a ledge you dangle them," said producer James Tsai. "It's possible to err and go too far, and get what is often a very messy result. Dismembering guys with propeller blades? Feeding them to wild animals? Stuffing them into wood chippers? It's all here." And who said games were all about murder and mutilation?



ETA
February
2005

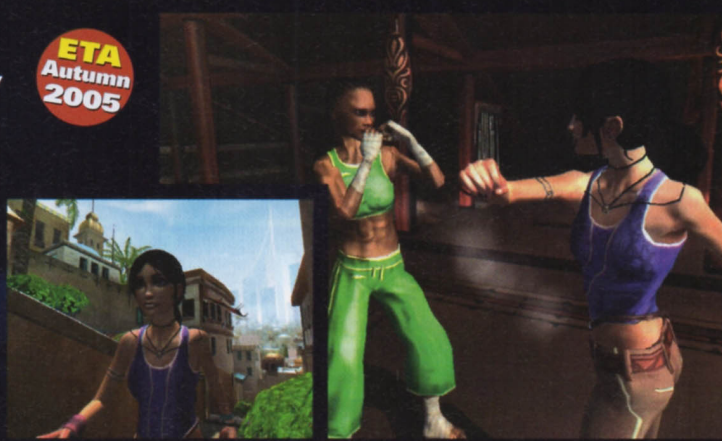
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

■ Pub: Funcom | Dev: Funcom | www.dreamfall.com

THE MUCH anticipated sequel to the point and click adventurer's wet dream *The Longest Journey* is seeing a shift in style – goodbye point and click, hello direct control. That's not all that's changed – the game is set ten years after the first, and will give you control of three different characters over the three worlds, one of which will be original heroine April Ryan.

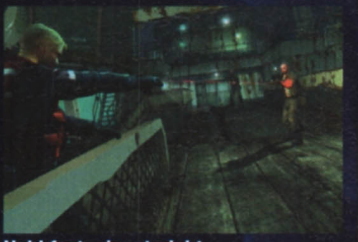
"In terms of gameplay, *Dreamfall* is a

very different beast," explains game director Ragnar Tornquist. "There's a lot more variety, more action, more combat, three playable characters, real choices and real consequences. In terms of story and character, however, we've worked hard to preserve the magical atmosphere and emotional depth that gamers remember from *The Longest Journey*." Let's hope the game's just as swearsy as before, too.



The presentation is sumptuous.

Now ladies, you don't want to chip a nail.



Hold fast, aim straight.



Spooky fog is assured.



The first game to induce actual sea-sickness.

COLD FEAR

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Darkworks | www.coldfeargame.com

HORROR titles can be ponderous affairs, but it looks as though there's little risk of *Cold Fear* going down that route. Described as an action horror game, it would seem to have more in common with the accomplished *The Suffering* than the increasingly plodding *Silent Hill* series. A healthy supply of weapons is promised, from pistols and AK47s to flamethrowers and harpoons, but ammunition is going to be at a premium.

Intriguingly, much of the game is to be set during a huge storm. One section



No shortage of blood then.

takes place on a whaling ship, and will see your movement affected by the raging winds and lashing waves. You'll also need to grab on to the railings to improve your aim – sure to bring back happy memories of chundering cross-channel ferry users everywhere.

PSYCHONAUTS

■ Pub: Majesco (US) | Dev: Double Fine
| www.psychonauts.com

FOLLOWING in the esteemed footsteps of *Grim Fandango* and *Full Throttle*, *Psychonauts* is Tim Schafer's latest oddball offering, a third-person action adventure that sees you trying to save a boot camp for the psychically gifted with the use of your paranormal abilities. Featuring loony environments, demented characters and barmy sub-challenges such as finding lost brains, *Psychonauts* looks set to deliver some bizarre comical action. If you're looking for a bit of originality among the surplus of sequels, start here.



Blockbusters, Schafer style. "Can I have an E please Bob?"

PCZONE
PRESENTS THE
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2005

ETA
First Half
2005

SPORTS

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5 | FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006
PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2006 | BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Beautiful Game | www.championshipmanager.co.uk

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

FIFA 2006 BETTING SUSPENDED
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: 1-20



Tactics include roughing up opponents to get a reaction.

DESPITE BEING billed as the battle of the brands, the head-to-head showdown between Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* and Eidos' *Championship Manager* never materialised, with CM5 now slated for any time between January and June of 2005.

According to brand director John Webb, "The PC release of *Championship Manager* 5 was deferred from October 2004 in order to allow for further development and refinement of the game. Whilst the game is in good shape, we believe that it will benefit from additional improvements to further increase its competitive edge."

However, with *Football Manager* 2005 flying off the shelves, it's a safe bet that the CM5 team have at least had a dabble with it.

"It's a good solid game but there are definitely areas where it could be improved,"

says Webb. "We constantly monitor all of our competitors and review our design to ensure that we maintain our leadership position. That said, we are continuing to concentrate on our original focus areas for CM5: speed of gameplay, realism and accessibility. Other than the significant speed gains which will be delivered by CM5, the biggest areas of improvement are in the training and tactical aspects of the game. Both have been considerably revamped working closely with Charlton Athletic's UEFA Pro-Certified First Team Coach, Mervyn Day. There are now more and more realistic tactical options to allow the manager to hone their team's performance, whilst the training area has been made more usable and accessible."

Needless to say, we'll be the judges of that. Verdict some time between January and June...

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

ETA
November
2005

■ Pub: Sega Europe | Dev: Sports Interactive | www.footballmanager.net



It may have a new name but *Football Manager* is still digital crack.

WITH FOOTBALL Manager 2005 proving one of the fastest-selling games of last year, the public appears to have accepted the new name of the game formerly known as *Championship Manager*. Sports Interactive isn't resting on its laurels though, as Miles Jacobson explained: "We've had a good start, but there is a long way to go yet. We're

judging the sales success on the first year, rather than the first few weeks. What we're delighted with is the reaction to the game from the fans and the press. They agree that it's the best game we've ever made, and now the challenge is improving on that in future versions. We haven't set a date as yet, but I'd expect it to be roughly the same time."

PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2

ETA
February
2005

■ Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Cyanide Studios | www.prorugbymanager.com

LAST YEAR'S inaugural *Pro Rugby* title proved something of a mixed bag, combining arcadey graphics with a hardcore management simulation to occasionally bewildering effect. In the traditional manner of sports games an annual update is on the cards, although it promises to be more than simply this year's model.

Leo Zullo, marketing director for Digital Jesters, confided: "We intend to build on last year's success with *Pro Rugby Manager* 2004. We're offering much more than just a statistical update of the players and teams, and have improved every aspect of the game."

Those improvements include new photo-realistic player modelling with accurate player builds, and a new training system that takes into account fitness, morale and physical condition. The spectators will even change their clothes according to the weather. Bleedin' egg-chasers!

BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET

■ Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | www.codemasters.co.uk

TEN YEARS after it first appeared on the Sega Mega Drive, Codemasters is reviving the *Brian Lara Cricket* series, promising One Day action, Test Matches and Tournaments.

In a reversal of tradition, the West

Indies may have been roundly whipped by England last summer, but Lara is still one of the all-time greats of the modern game, and remembers his financially beneficial endorsement fondly.

"It's great to be back working with Codemasters again," blubbed Lara. "I've always been proud of my association with the games. I'm often asked if a new one was coming. Codemasters always does a great job in capturing the essence of cricket and I know it's brought me, and the sport in general, a whole lot of new supporters."

ETA
Summer
2005



"Codemasters always does a great job in capturing the essence of cricket"

X2: THE RETURN
BATTLE OF BRITAIN

FLIGHT/SPACE SIMS

X2: THE RETURN

■ Pub: Koch Media | Dev: Egosoft | www.egosoft.com



Oh no, not the red mist. Last time this happened we razed a solar system...

THE PAST FEW months have been busy ones for the team at Egosoft, as you'd expect when you're trying to create a universe. OK, it only took the fella upstairs seven days (one of which he bunked off), but then he didn't have to take the most comprehensive space-based trading/shooting/building game of last year and add planet-based missions, racing events, player headquarters and a brand new targeting system.

The most recent work has been on the planet missions. We were lucky enough to be shown an early, unfinished Alpha-state version showing two ships ducking and weaving between a series of futuristic skyscrapers. Unfortunately for fans, you won't actually get to fly around on the planets, rather you're given controls of the ship's gun turret and have to try and shoot down a fleeing criminal. Limited maybe, but it, like half the new missions, has been designed to

further the story, introduce game elements that might not otherwise have been discovered and break up the monotony of sitting in space.

Another recent addition is the aforementioned races. Ever hungry for new ideas, the team were playing *Vice City* and marvelling at the way you could get all sorts of extra tasks just by exploring. To that end *X2: The Return* has trod a similar path, one such being the racing leagues. Either just for fun or as a way to raise much needed revenue, the races feature different leagues for different ship types and see you rocketing from one point of the galaxy to the other fending off natural and unnatural enemies along the way.

On a much larger scale are the player HQs, finally taking shape after months of testing. Acting as a focal point for your burgeoning trading/bounty hunting/pirate empire, an HQ expands your overview of the whole game and gives you all manner of strategic commands such as 'Invade Sector X.' You're only allowed one mind you, so use it wisely.

Luckily, all these recent additions haven't had any noticeable effect on the timescale of the game, still due for an April release. It has meant that work on the much talked about online game (codenamed *X2OL*) hasn't really progressed much, although we're assured that ideas and concepts are continually being jotted down and that once *The Return* has arrived, work will begin in earnest. Unless the team decides to work on *X3* instead. Decisions, decisions...



You can now enter your ships in local racing leagues.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2005
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: 50-1

ELITE 4
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: 1000-1

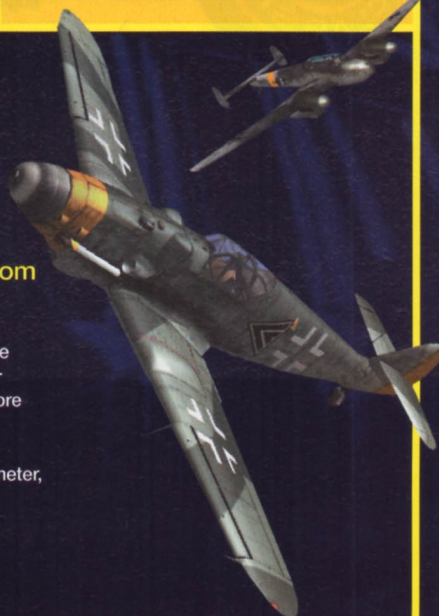
WING COMMANDER 6
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2005: 10000-1

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: 1C: Maddox Games | www.ubisoft.com

NOT MUCH has been revealed about Oleg Maddox's follow-up to the staggeringly good *IL-2* flight sim series (even the name is just a working title and likely to change), although we were lucky enough to be given a secret showing of some of the game's early 3D models several months ago. To say they were

looking detailed would be an understatement to say the least. The plan is to simulate the fight over our war-torn skies on a scale never before attempted – and if the 128-player multiplayer technology shown in *Pacific Fighters* is any kind of barometer, Maddox is already halfway there.



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REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

BARREN TIMES



■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ Groan. One look at the paltry collection of PC game reviews this month and you'd be forgiven for thinking that it's not only the ZONE team feeling the effects of a heavy Yuletide season, but also the videogame companies themselves. With all the big-hitters including *Doom 3*, *Rome: Total War* and *Half-Life 2* released between August and November, it leaves us mopping up the gaming scraps with a cranberry sauce-stained dishcloth.

Appropriately then, our first review is *Scrapland*, a half-decent sci-fi action adventure that was taken under the wing of ex-id Software bod American McGee late in development – you can read our verdict on page 76. We continue with a couple of EA games, *NBA 2005* and *Armies Of Exigo*, but with *The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth* on sale, you shouldn't bother investing in either. Plus, we let Steve Hill loose on the bizarre *The Journey To Wild Divine*, which promises entertainment with the addition of spiritual healing. You can find out whether Hill's aura has changed from its usual pitch-black appearance on page 78.

Big news for reviews this month is the promotion of Indie Zone to its own full-time position. Check out our homage to underground developers on page 90.

And as the nights draw in, why not check out our Games of 2004 Supertest on page 92, use your Christmas vouchers to stock up on the best titles of the year, and spend some serious time getting to know the intimate sub-routines of your big white box. When your eyes start to twitch after 12 hours straight with Gordon Freeman and pals, you can then take a breather and read PC ZONE's massive 2005 preview special, starting on p29. You'd better get cracking though – there are some great games already out there to complete before starting on *F.E.A.R.*, *Black & White 2*, *Quake IV*, *Brothers In Arms*, *Doom: Resurrection Of Evil*, *KOTOR 2*...



Can this sci-fi robot action-adventure cure your post-Christmas blues?

SCRAPLAND 76

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2005*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.

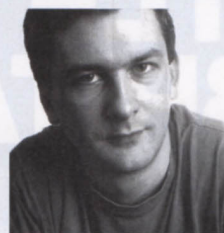


The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM

QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?
2. What's your New Year's resolution?



DAVE WOODS

Half-Life 2, *World Of Warcraft*
To never go near another wheat beer again



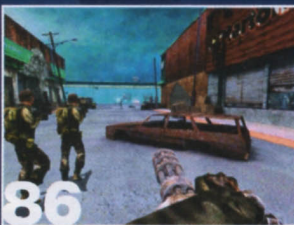
JAMIE SEFTON

Half-Life 2, *GTA: San Andreas*
To improve my anger-management skills.
(*Impossible - Ed*)



82

ATLANTIS EVOLUTION
Sunken city tales



86

REPLAY
Games going cheap!



90

INDIE ZONE
DIY gaming takes to the stage



92

SUPERTEST
What's the Game Of The Year 2004?

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WHAT WILL BE CROWNED
THE BEST GAME OF
2004? THE ZONE TEAM
DELIBERATES OVER A
FEW WHEAT BEERS...



THE JOURNEY TO WILD DIVINE 78



NBA 2005 79



ARMIES OF EXIGO 80



PAUL PRESLEY

Lots of MMORPGs
Play more MMORPGs



WILL PORTER

Half-Life 2, KOTOR, Vampire:
The Masquerade - Bloodlines
To thwart evil once and for all



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Joint Ops: Escalation,
Half-Life 2, Plumm
Undermine the global
military-industrial complex.
And read more



MARTIN KORDA

Vampire: The Masquerade -
Bloodlines, Half-Life 2
To make a more concerted
effort to diminish the world's
beef supplies



STEVE HILL

Half-Life 2, GTA: San Andreas
Get a driving licence



RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Lots of MMORPGs
Play less MMORPGs



What the medical droid from *Star Wars* did next...

SCRAPLAND

■ £29.99 | Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Mercury Steam | ETA: January 28
www.scrapland.com

REQUIRES: PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES: P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Michael Filby gives himself a polish and ventures into circuit city

WE'VE found ourselves comparing a few titles to *GTA* in recent months. The upcoming *Boiling Point* and *STALKER* are both exhibiting signs that they may end up aping the freeform mission structure of the Rockstar classic, but saying *Scrapland* is like *GTA* is a little like comparing Supermarket Own-brand Lager to the real thing – the concepts

are the same, but the former is considerably watered down. Thankfully though, *Scrapland* doesn't taste like piss.

At the centre of its imaginatively realised sci-fi world is a robotic chap by the name of D-Tritus, who has constructed himself from, erm, detritus. After happening upon the titular planet inhabited entirely by metal guys and gals, D-Tritus becomes a journalist, the "lowliest job in the galaxy" (no ho ho, our sides are splitting). Soon enough, the mechanical Archbishop gets bumped off, and our intrepid robot chum is assigned to cover the story.

The reason this particular murder is such a big deal revolves around *Scrapland*'s central conceit – the Great Database.

This is basically a massive hard drive that stores all the information needed to replicate robot citizens upon their destruction, effectively granting immortality.

However, the Archbishop's file has been stolen, rendering his erasure one that's more permanent than usual.

Your investigation entails a series of missions given by a variety of shady characters, which are split across two main sections – indoor areas that are traversed on foot, and huge outdoor space lanes that draw an obvious influence from *The Fifth Element*. The latter in particular do a splendid job of showing off the massive, remarkable game world, rendered with a mixture of bright colours and a sizeable dollop of vision. The foot-based sections are riddled with neat touches too, such as the areas of floor that raise up from below to meet your feet as you run across an expanse.

For the first few hours, simply running around this gorgeous

world is enough to stroke your entertainment organ. There's also the promptly-awarded ability to transform into a number of different characters through the use of the Great Database, or by simply overwriting anyone you bump into. This is considered illegal though, so whenever you're using this ability, you have to steer clear of the scanning beams of the beholders –

INPERSPECTIVE

GTA: VICE CITY

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 95%
For a true freeform mission structure, there's no substitute.

TRON 2.0

Reviewed Issue 134, Score 83%
Visually, *Scrapland* has taken a few tips from this surprisingly good FPS.





Cops who like gambling? Surely not...



The cityscapes are a real treat to fly around.



The Gary Glitterbots are best avoided.

"Why, I'd oil your nuts, son."

"Scrapland is so very nearly a deliciously complete package"

floating globes that'll alert the robot cops to your law-breaking antics given half a chance.

Unfortunately, there comes a point when you're through with marvelling at the scenery, have finished chuckling at the amusing but sadly limited selection of satirical characters, and have tired of taking your ship around the vast cityscapes. Once the novelty has outstayed its welcome, you're left with the missions to keep you going.

There are only two main mission threads – one advances the story, and the other lets you complete challenges in exchange for spaceship parts and the like. That's not to say the game doesn't live up to its promise of being freeform, at least to a certain extent. You're free to pick which thread to follow at any particular time,

and you can challenge any of the world's inhabitants to a race or some ship-to-ship combat to earn cash, which is mainly used for building custom ships. Sadly, there's little that distinguishes these side missions from the stream of missions you need to follow to move the story on.

PARANOID ANDROID

In those first few golden hours, there's larks-a-plenty to be had in accepting missions to wipe out other robots, or to hop into your ship and destroy some cops. As the missions all start to blur into the same two or three variations on a theme however, what was previously a pleasure

gradually turns into a repetitive chore. Run across the map and kill someone, then photograph something, then run back and kill someone else before, yes, another photography mission. Familiarity that doesn't so much breed contempt as plain old boredom.

This lack of new things to do is accompanied by a handful of other flaws and general rough edges that really should have been ironed out. In addition to

MISSSED OPPORTUNITY



Is it choice, or just the illusion of choice?

IT'S FREEFORM, JIM, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

What really holds *Scrapland* back from true greatness is the fact that, despite being set in a vast world that's simply begging for open-ended adventuring, the thrust of the game itself is actually deceptively linear. With only one rigid path that has to be followed to progress the story, there's simply no need to do any of the identical challenges that can be issued by the non-mission characters. Without a branching mission structure and a real choice of what to do next, *Scrapland's* world is simply wasted.

is frankly lame. The whole set up doesn't feel as coherent as it should, either – naive but friendly simpleton D-Tritus is happy to go around blasting up innocents in cold blood with a smile on his face.

SCRAPHEAP CHALLENGED

Scrapland is so very nearly a deliciously complete package. It's blessed with an excellently executed game world to wander around at your leisure, a twisted sense of humour (some of which actually manages to be funny), and great ship dynamics and combat. If only there was more to do, more variety and more choice, we may well have had a bona fide classic on our hands. As it stands, *Scrapland* is like a supermodel with a venereal disease – drop-dead gorgeous, and you can still have some fun with it, but you'll ultimately be deprived of the money shot. **[C-]**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Instinctive controls
- ✓ Great flying and dog-fighting
- ✓ Beautifully designed and realised game world
- ✗ Becomes highly repetitive
- ✗ Limited number of robot types
- ✗ Counter-intuitive ship-building

76

Rusty nuts



some typos, there are some glitches that result in irritating incongruities, such as characters talking to you as D-Tritus when you've transformed into a different character. To make matters worse, the foot combat



Levitate an orb by breathing deeply. You know you want to.



Close your eyes and visualise an apple. Look, there's one.



Never trust a hippy.



This dance goes on for five minutes.

THE JOURNEY TO WILD DIVINE

■ £120 | Pub: The Wild Divine Project | Dev: The Wild Divine Project
ETA: Out Now | www.magitam.co.uk

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve Hill takes a deep breath and breaks on through to the other side

IMAGINE A world of boundless possibilities. A world where body and mind fuse with nature to form a blissful union of peace and beauty. A world where even jugglers have mates... Welcome to *The Journey To Wild Divine*, possibly the strangest piece of software

INPERSPECTIVE

MYST IV: REVELATION

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 85%
Compared to *Wild Divine*, this is an action-packed thriller.

HALF-LIFE 2

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 97%
Absolutely nothing like it, but we think you might enjoy this more.

to land on the ZONE doormat in our illustrious history. And indeed the strangest piece of hardware, namely the glowing Light Zone and the accompanying Magic Rings. The what now? Pay attention. According to the press release, "In the future, computer games won't be controlled by keyboards and joysticks." Guess what? "The future is now..."

This blinkered vision of the future involves plugging in the

USB Light Stone and attaching the three Magic Rings to your fingers. Why? In order to measure your heart-rate variability and skin conductance level obviously, thus enabling you to participate in events throughout the magical world of The Sun Realm.

READY STEADY GOA

That realm is nevertheless largely negotiated via the mouse, and consists of a series of pre-rendered scenes that in 1995 would have been described as 'stunning', replete with super-imposed live action video of badly dressed actors. So far, so *Myst*, but the key difference is that your non-mouse operating hand is strapped up like a hospital patient. This comes into play when faced with such challenges as levitating a ball or lighting a fire, at which point you're required to embark on a breathing exercise, thus altering your heart-rate and completing the task.

Essentially interactive yoga, it's a bizarre state of affairs, and one that's not without its pitfalls. The mystical so-called Peaceful Breath requires you to alternately inhale and exhale for seven seconds at a time in order to achieve an inner calm and slow your heart. In practice, however, this caused a minor asthma attack and a sizeable increase in heart-rate.

Some 'events' do actually require you to raise your heart-rate, and suggest doing so by exaggerating your breathing and imagining an exciting situation. Not the most dignified of experiences: seeing three multi-coloured balls being remotely juggled is scant reward for puffing hard while thinking about hanging out the back of a young strumpet.

Presumably aimed at psychedelic drug users – as hinted at by a purple haze preceding the breathing events – even so, this is tortuous fare. If you're stoned off your napper,

you're more likely to get sucked into something like *Football Manager 2005* than painstaking airy-fairy nonsense such as this.

Then there's the price. A whopping £120 buys you the biofeedback hardware, a bonus CD of interviews with mind-body guru Deepak Chopra, a 100-page book, a soundtrack of sub-Floyd drivel, and of course the game. Which is the first of a trilogy... [22]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Something different
- ✓ Endorsed by the Dalai Lama
- ✗ Obscenely expensive
- ✗ Painfully slow
- ✗ Sensors wrinkle your fingers

36

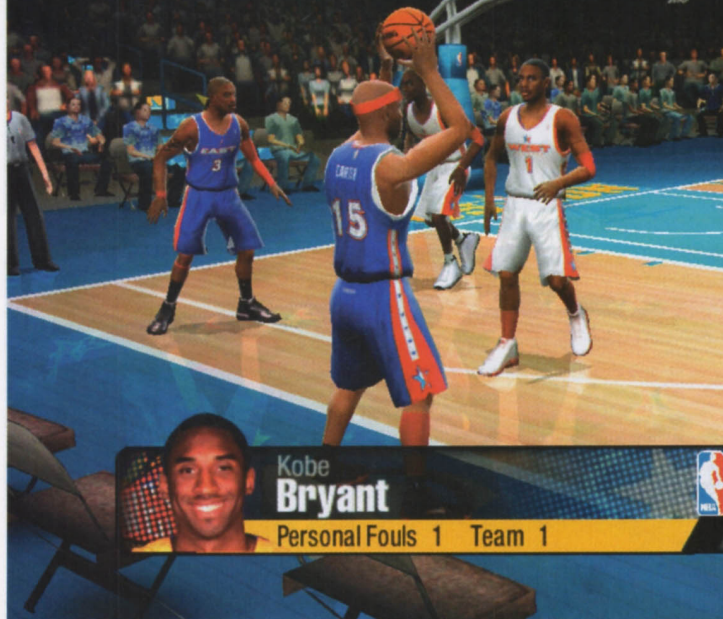
For weirdos and hippies, if they can afford it...



Defensive Foul
Eastern All-Stars Ball

NBA LIVE 2005

REVIEWS



Kobe
Bryant

Personal Fouls 1 Team 1

Looks like the assault charges blew over then...



NBA LIVE 2005

£29.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: EA Sports | ETA: Out Now | www.easports.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill shoots from downtown and gets it in the hoop

THERE'S AN argument that says we shouldn't even review these annual EA sports updates. Given the incremental improvements, it's almost the equivalent of reviewing a patch. It's a theory that EA would appear to endorse, given the difficulty we had extracting a review copy from them. By the time you read this, *NBA Live 2005* may well be residing in the bargain bin, along with all the previous incarnations.

That's no reason to ignore it though, as in the EA Sports tradition, it's a highly polished affair, whatever you think of basketball as a sport. While it's easy to dismiss it as an American version of netball played by overpaid freaks, it can be pretty absorbing if you

give it a chance, as we regularly find out every E3, clashing as it does with the annual NBA play-offs. And having witnessed Mallo's roommate launch household objects at the wall as the LA Lakers spunked another lead, we can confirm that it certainly engenders passion amongst its fans. In fact, more recently, a riot broke out at an NBA game, with millionaire players wading into hotdog-munching fans.

Thankfully, such disgraceful behaviour is absent from *NBA Live 2005*, although it's pretty much the only thing that is. For a sports game, there's a staggering amount of depth, and it's almost too bewildering for the average punter to get into. Thankfully, it can be simplified to a playable level, although to get the most out of it, a PlayStation 2 pad is pretty much essential, with the secondary stick providing some impressive freestyle moves.

DUNKIN' DONUTS

As ever, it's a lot more fun attacking than defending. The nature of basketball means defence (or as the crowd would have it, "De-fence! De-fence!") is far more of a strategic area than an individual affair, and given that you can only control one player at a time, it can prove largely ineffective. Going forward is a different matter



You can probably see a virtual Jack Nicholson cheering from the sidelines.

though, and with practice (and all the aids turned on and the game on rookie level) you can produce some impressive alley-oops and so forth.

For those who actually follow the series, new features include adjustable mid-air lay-ups and dunks, as well as the aforementioned alley-oops. Ultimately though, you will spend a lot of time floundering about attempting to work out what button does what while

your opponents put on a display of Harlem Globetrotters-style dexterity. Some close matches are possible, with the frustration of your defence being torn apart only countered by you doing the same ad infinitum, until the final frantic few seconds. And more than most sports game, it's a lot more fun winning than losing. *NBA Live 2005* is undeniably an impressive game, but not one that you're actually going to play, especially on PC. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Extremely authentic
- ✓ Wide range of modes
- ✓ All official players and teams
- ✗ Bewildering for the uninitiated
- ✗ Essentially a console game

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For the faithful few



You'll believe a man can fly.

INPERSPECTIVE

NBA LIVE 2004

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 74%
Same game, different year.

NBA LIVE 2003

Reviewed Issue 124, Score 64%
Fewer features, but again the same.



Superweapon effects can be disappointingly understated.



The audience regretted eating the prawns from the buffet.



The Fallen are the most intriguing faction in the game.

ARMIES OF EXIGO

■ £29.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Black Hole Entertainment | ETA: Out Now
www.armiesofexigo.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 384MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Michael Filby goes deeper underground for EA's new fantasy RTS

IF THE FPS is the most over-represented genre on the PC right now, then the RTS must surely rank as a close second. Consequently, they have to do something pretty special to earn our attention – like *The Battle For Middle-earth's* top-draw movie licence; or *Warhammer: Dawn Of War's* superior design sensibilities; or *Rome: Total War's* utter brilliance. Unfortunately, *Armies Of Exigo* for the most part, is pretty much bog standard.

Set in a fantasy world that inspires déjà vu and not much more, the rent-a-plot hinges around the Empire (a coalition of humans and elves) defending their land in the realm of Noran against the invading Beast Tribes (orcs, trolls and... well, you know). This translates into a lengthy single-player campaign made up of a time-consuming 36 missions, consisting of 12 mission chapters each based on one of the three factions. As brain-meltingly predictable as the two factions are, *Exigo* plays a blinder with its third – The Fallen. A race of genuinely



Millwall fans enjoy their European adventure.



The underworld is prettier than the land above.

creepy Geiger-esque creatures. The Fallen manage to look brilliant and have a noticeably different feel to how they play.

GOING DOWN

Exigo's other carrot of innovation nestling within its vomit puddle of unoriginality lies in the fact that there are two levels to each map. By sending your units into an access point, they can travel down to the underworld consisting of dungeon-like caverns. The concept is well implemented, and it's far easier than you might think to keep track of units over what are essentially two different maps, but it's a shame that many of the campaign missions rely on

linearly guiding you through these areas via objective-based missions. Other than that, it's pretty much business

as usual, with a triple-faceted resource system that will be recognised by anyone familiar with *Age Of Empires*, a superweapon system that fans of *Command & Conquer: Generals* will be comfortable with, and a dynamic of build your base/amass your army/swarm the enemy that will remind you of a thousand other RTS titles.

Exigo's other flaws are, thankfully, minor. The graphics are mostly perfunctory, and are bland enough to make it tricky to keep up with what's going on during larger battles. Also, although there are some seriously nice-looking cinematics, the majority of the story is told through in-engine cut-scenes that tend to drag more than an episode of *Antiques Roadshow*. The viewing angle of the camera is also frustratingly fixed.

But despite its flaws (and have we mentioned its unoriginality?), *Armies Of Exigo* is a functional, mindless but surprisingly fun, way to while

away the hours of your life. Playing as The Fallen can be deliciously entertaining, and the more engrossing levels can keep you going for nearly an hour apiece without boredom creeping in. Sure, there are better strategy games to get through before you'd bother considering this, but at least you know there's something decent waiting once you've made your way through the rest. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 93%
 Half RTS, half turn-based strategy, but all brilliant. The most accessible of the series yet has something for every strategy-head.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS:

BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 91%
 Nobody does fantasy better than Tolkien on a Peter Jackson trip, so if you're going to go down that route, you may as well immerse yourself in the rich environments of Middle-earth.



PCZONE VERDICT

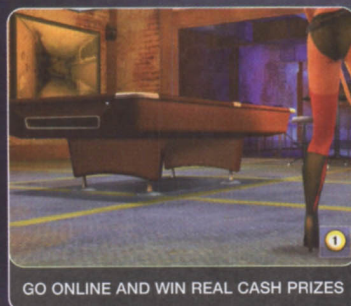
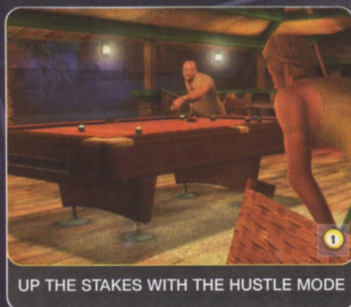
- ✓ Multi-levelled maps work well
- ✓ Some impressive cinematics
- ✓ The Fallen add zest to a bland mix
- ✗ Seen most of it before
- ✗ Story told with little flair
- ✗ Can lose track of what's going on during larger battles

70

Unoriginal but competent fantasy fare

Pool:Shark 2

GO HUSTLE



OUT
NOVEMBER
2004



XBOX
LIVE
ONLINE ENABLED



PlayStation 2



ZOO
Digital Publishing

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ATLANTIS EVOLUTION

■ £29.99 | Pub: The Adventure Company |
Dev: Atlantis Interactive Entertainment | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800, 64MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve O'Hagan gets lost and most uncivilised



The static visuals are fine – it goes wrong when things start moving.

THE LATEST in a succession of point-and-click adventure titles set in the fabled sunken city is *Atlantis Evolution*. And these games draw quite a following in France, Germany and assorted countries other than ours apparently.

The game kicks off and before you know it, you've been sucked down a whirlpool and into the mystical land of New Atlantis. Strange creatures, fantastical craft and an evil dictator soon present themselves, and your far-flung adventures begin.

From this point on, we didn't like *Atlantis* one bit. There's nothing wrong with point-and-click per se, it's just that like other near-obsolete genres such as the 2D shoot 'em up and pinball sim, it takes something out of the ordinary to make them appealing in this day and age. *Atlantis* lacks that certain something. In droves.

Sure, the static visuals are well drawn, but as soon as anything has to move it all starts looking rosey. OK, the story might satisfy wide-eyed 11 year olds, but the scripting, voice acting and attempts at humour are risible. And unlike *Mysterious Island* – another point-and-clicker released by The Adventure Company and reviewed on this page – the fantastical setting of *Atlantis* means the puzzles are even more mind-numbingly obscure than usual for the genre.

Titles like this are for a different class of gamer from those who read these pages. They're for those who have retired from the bright lights and adrenalinised action of contemporary gaming. It's the gaming equivalent of smoking a pipe and wearing slippers.



**PCZONE
VERDICT**

39

Pointless point-and-click



Mysterious Island is the Verne book with the Nautilus, if you're wondering.



The waterfall looks lovely. Pity you can't walk up and have a look.

RETURN TO MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

■ £19.99 | Pub: The Adventure Company |
Dev: Kheops Studio | ETA: February 25

REQUIRES PIII 800, 64 MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256 MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

No man is an island. Steve O'Hagan is incontinent, though

WASHING UP on our shores this month is another point-and-clicker – *Mysterious Island*. As shipwrecked lady Mina, stranded on an apparently deserted tropical island, you have to set about discovering where you are and how the hell you're going to get home in this old-school adventure.

Loosely based on a Jules Verne novel, *Mysterious Island* immediately grabs you with its classic predicament. Being a castaway and having to dig up some food to survive on is something everyone can relate to, especially if you've ever been a student. Also appealing are the nicely drawn environments and sense of mystery your new home exudes.

Despite the idyllic surroundings, however, this honeymoon doesn't last forever. While you immediately relate to the *Robinson Crusoe* situation, the

solutions to your mundane problems can be extravagant and frustrating, with not enough feedback as to what you're doing wrong and what the hell you're expected to do next. The vast array of items you end up with only compounds the problem, and you'll often resort to that hated practice of randomly combining and using bits of detritus in the hope they'll sort out your dilemma.

The restrictive point-and-click system will always be an issue for most of us ("See that sand over there? Can't go there"), but the price and intriguing scenario mean that this isn't a total waste of time for those who fancy some arcane adventuring.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

51

Island of frustration

CSI: MIAMI



CSI: MIAMI

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: 369 Interactive | ETA: Out now

REQUIRES PIII 600, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 384MB RAM and a 32 MB 3D card

Steve O'Hagan tests for residual shreds of gameplay in another bland point-and-clicker



The locations are pretty ugly, it has to be said.

SIFTING through a pile of puke with a pair of tweezers and then analysing the hair found therein by means of microscopy is not, under normal circumstances, the stuff of an enthralling game. But when you're emulating TV's favourite forensic whodunit, what other choice have you got?

CSI: Miami is a show where a bunch of struggling actors solve crimes across South Florida with a mixture of old-fashioned detective work and new-fangled forensics. Which initially leads to some interesting gaming. There's no action, and instead you visit locations to talk to suspects and gather evidence. Notice a suspicious looking substance on the corpse's trousers? Take a swab. Looking for fingerprints? Spray some Ninhydrin around the place.

With your evidence safely zip-locked it's off to the morgue or labs for analysis, and once you've got what you need and

the 'evidence trinity' of suspect, victim and location is complete, you swoop in for the arrest. Full marks for doing something different, but it doesn't hang together as an enthralling game experience.

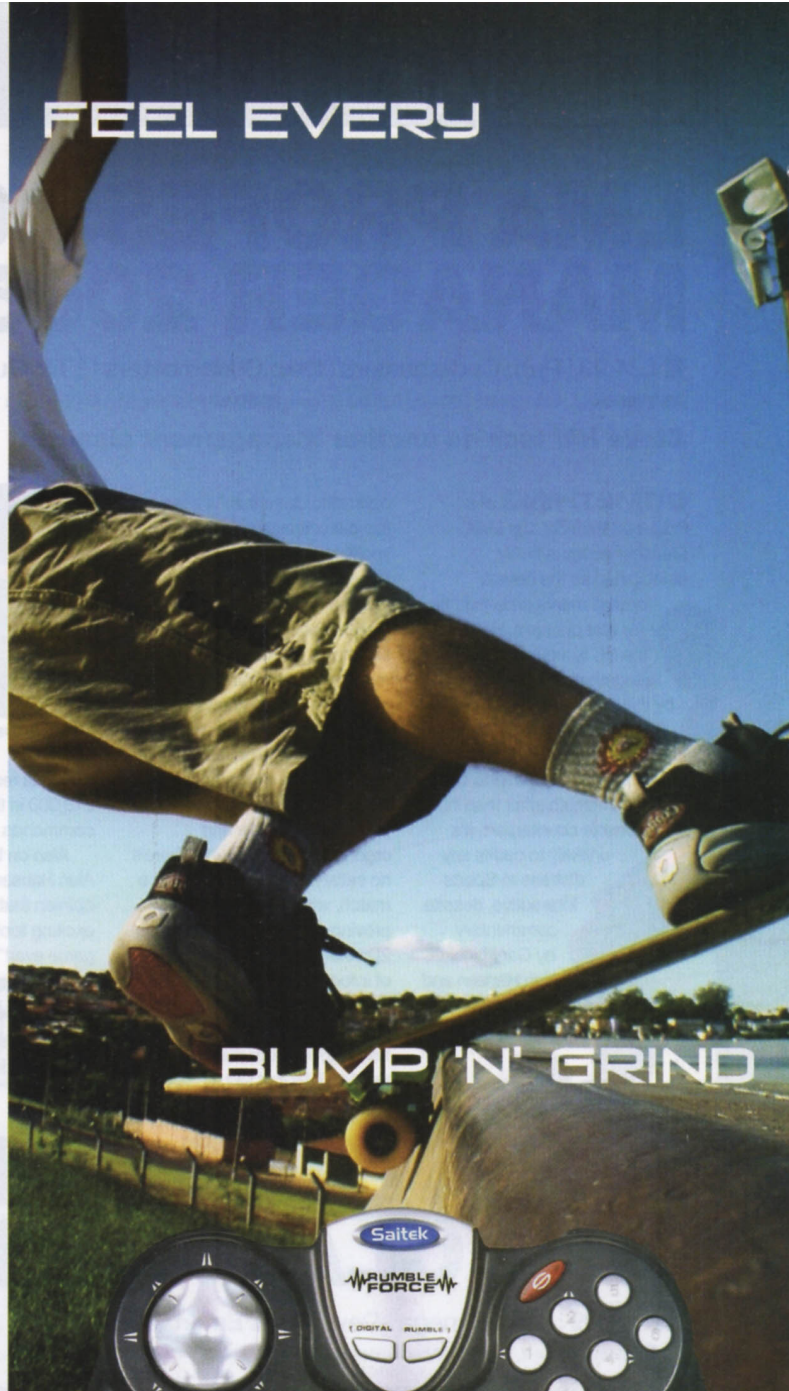
Interrogations are simply a matter of exhausting the supplied question options, and every shred of evidence has to be correctly inspected using the appropriate piece of equipment to find the next clue. It's like a survival horror game stripped of everything bar the cut-scenes and puzzles. Locations are bland and static – click on something to look at it, click on someone to talk to them. The whole thing's about as free-roaming as a man in a straightjacket locked in a padded cell, and about as fast moving as a glacier.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

55

Case closed

FEEL EVERY



BUMP 'N' GRIND



P2500 RUMBLE PAD



P3000 WIRELESS
PAD AND
DOCKING STATION



P880
DUAL ANALOG
PAD



P220
DIGITAL
PAD

Saitek™
www.saitek.com

LMA PROFESSIONAL MANAGER 2005

■ £34.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill tackles another management also-ran

SOMETHING of a fixture on the PS2, the *LMA Manager* series is firmly established as the default football management game for that platform. However, the PC is a different bag altogether, overshadowed by the behemoth that is *Football Manager 2005*.

While *LMA Professional Manager 2005* claims to be a more in-depth affair than its console counterpart, it's unlikely to cause any distress at Sports Interactive, despite commentary by Gary Lineker, Alan Hansen and Barry Davies, and the somewhat

optimistic claim that "it's the only football management game you'll ever need!" Those words appear on the back of the box, and the fact that we're reading them is testament to their falsehood, with the lack of early review code damning the game before we've even had a touch.

Codemasters' reluctance would appear to have been well-placed, as it's a cumbersome affair hampered by an interface that is aesthetically and ergonomically bankrupt. There's no satisfying way of watching a match, with the 3D action proving stilted and over-long, the 2D version offering little by way of information or excitement, and both of them ignoring key features such as instant feedback on your players. As for realism, let's just say a player



Wax on, wax off.

who was recently transferred for £10,000 in the real world here commands a fee of £1.8m.

Also on the back of the box is Alan Hansen's considered opinion that it's "The most exciting football management game ever!" The man is a liar.

PCZONE VERDICT 48
Mid-table mediocrity



The 2D match view is largely useless.



A packed crowd at the Deva Stadium.

CREATURE CONFLICT: THE CLAN WARS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Cenega | Dev: Mithis Entertainment | ETA: February 4

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.8GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Bestiality always was one of **Steve O'Hagan's** strong points

YOU MAY have had *Worms*. Not the five metre intestinal kind that hang out of your arse, but the humorous turn-based strategy game. Either way, the experience of *Creature Conflicts* will be somewhat familiar.

What we have here is gangs of animals scrapping it out with a variety of kooky weaponry on tiny planets, cartoon-style. Each player – human or AI – controls a squad of ravenous wolves, beavers or whatever, and takes it in turns to move and attack.

A turn comprises 25 seconds of real-time, where you run about the place, grabbing power-ups, jumping through teleporters, firing yourself from catapults, and most importantly, attacking your enemy. Attacks range from blatting someone with an iron to plastering them with a goo blaster, but you only get one per turn. Once you've done the damage, you get a little extra time to peg it and hide. It's all easily mastered, and a fair bit of fun. But it's not likely to be one of those sleeper hits you keep coming back to.

First up, the comedy weapons lack the sadistic glee of *Worms'* exploding grannies and sheep. Secondly, the nature of the game's 3D micro-planets makes the ballistics of throwing grenades and arcing your rocket attacks far too difficult, taking away the child-like satisfaction of lobbing a grenade perfectly



You can control your beasts in third- or first-person.



Monkeys fighting beavers? Unnatural.



Zoom out to check where everyone is.

on to your invertebrate 2D opponent in *Worms*. In all, it'd be worth a punt if it were half the price, but not for 30 notes.

PCZONE VERDICT 59
No match for *Worms*

PREMIER MANAGER 2004-2005

£29.99 | Pub: Zoo Digital Publishing |
Dev: Zoo Digital Publishing | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 733, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 600MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve Hill scrapes the footy management barrel



It's good to talk to cartoon chairmen.

| NAME | STAMINA | SPEED | STRENGTH | AGILITY |
|-----------|---------|-------|----------|---------|
| T Turner | 85 | 75 | 85 | 75 |
| D Stamp | 75 | 65 | 75 | 65 |
| D Carr | 65 | 55 | 65 | 55 |
| A Walker | 55 | 45 | 55 | 45 |
| S Hasey | 45 | 35 | 45 | 35 |
| M Cook | 35 | 25 | 35 | 25 |
| M Branch | 25 | 15 | 25 | 15 |
| W Brown | 15 | 5 | 15 | 5 |
| C Cole | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| D Collins | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S Vaughan | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| A Harris | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Chester, in mathematical form.

TIME WAS, back in the mid-90s, the *Premier Manager* series was actually a contender, providing a jauntier alternative to the hardcore stylings of the all-conquering *Championship Manager*. Nowadays, all that remains is the name, and a decade of progress has resulted in a game that is actually more primitive than the original. In fact as I write these words, it's running in a window, chugging away on a PC that can do justice to *Half-Life 2*.

To the untrained mind, it doesn't look too dissimilar to Eidos' forthcoming 'all-new' *Championship Manager*, with full-length matches played out by amorphous

blobs at an isometric angle. The difference here is that it's painfully slow, to the point of being unwatchable for more than a few seconds, and even then only to scoff at its ineptitude. A more rapid option, replete with stats, is available, but it bears such little relation to football that you might as well simply poke yourself in the eyes and watch the colours.

The game is also available on PS2, as hinted at by the appearance of PS2 controls in the interface. More worrying is the fact that it's also on Game Boy Advance, and the PC version would appear to be only moderately more sophisticated. In fact, we've seen more complex mobile phone games.

Premier Manager 2004-2005 is a game of such little substance, you'd be offended if it was free. To actually release it as a commercial product – for 30 quid! – is bordering on criminal.

PCZONE VERDICT **12**
Garbage

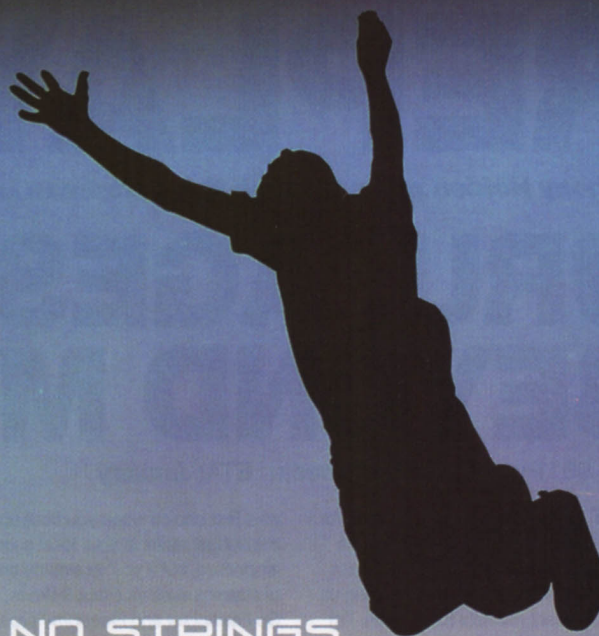


The excitement is non-palpable.



Blue blobs 0, Yellow blobs 0.

COMPLETE CONTROL



NO STRINGS
ATTACHED



WITH 2.4GHZ
TECHNOLOGY

CYBORG EVO WIRELESS



CYBORG EVO
FORCE FEEDBACK



CYBORG EVO

Saitek™
www.saitek.com

REPLAY

Anthony Holden picks through the Christmas leftovers

URU: AGES BEYOND MYST

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: January

NOT THE most obvious choice for budget game of the month, but hey, it's a lean time of year. All the big Christmas releases have come and gone, leaving us just a few scant morsels for January. I'm not trying to suggest that *Uru* should be

your first choice when you front up to the budget racks at your local game emporium, but if you've already tired of classics such as *Black & White*, *Op Flashpoint* and *Freedom Force*, it might just deserve a look.



Uru has some dazzling environments.



"I'll need some munchies after this..."



Discover a world of bad turtle-necks.



Not mushroom there. Sorry.

Indeed, this is perhaps the most impressive game in the *Myst* cannon so far, and has plenty to offer if you're looking for a slower-paced style of adventuring. (Like, say, elderly historians or library folk.) The environments are typically sumptuous and detailed, but are now navigable in true 3D, with an actual third-person character no less (a first for the series). Other achievements are many: an extremely minimal interface with no inventory, a compelling and imaginative storyline and some genuinely intelligent puzzles are all here.

Unfortunately, *Uru* was originally intended as a primer for an online game that never eventuated, and as such is a bit

short on content – 10-15 hours at best. This has been partially rectified by the free add-on *Uru: To D'ni* and the retail expansion pack *The Path Of The Shell*, but the game still feels a bit sparse.

Still, you have to give it to them. The folks at Cyan Worlds know how to craft an immersive and fascinating alien world, and *Uru* is one of its best yet.

PCZONE VERDICT

73

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

■ £19.99 | Pub: THQ | ETA: Out Now



Charming, but a bit dull really.

THIS WAS meant to be the game that reinvigorated the adventure genre, with its bold new interface, fully navigable 3D world and *Shenmue*-style 'action points'. Well, this and *Sam & Max 2*. Less said... As it is, *The Sleeping Dragon* may have done more harm than good. While the transition to 3D is largely successful and the action elements mesh nicely, the game has one key problem – it's a bit dull. The dialogue is verbose, the characters stereotyped and the crate shifting puzzles interminable.

Worse still, the game trots out the same old conspiracy-laden, Da Vinci-



When the *Crystal Maze* went wrong...

code storyline that infects the whole genre, full of Knights Templar, ancient ciphers and mysterious Gaia powers.

In every other way the game is sound, and if you're a fan of the series you'll probably love it. Indeed, your enjoyment will be exactly proportional to how much nostalgia you have for this sort of thing. Be warned though: *Grim Fandango* it ain't.

PCZONE VERDICT

65

TERMINATOR 3: WAR OF THE MACHINES

■ £9.99 | Pub: Atari Best Of | ETA: December 17

THAT THE *Terminator* legacy should be reduced to this is a disgrace of *Phantom Menace* proportions. *War Of The Machines* is a hideous abortion of a game, an ugly, ill-conceived and fatally unplayable mess that does little to hide its take-the-money-and-run intentions.

Purportedly a multiplayer-focused FPS, it is in reality a cruel joke. The AI is non-existent, the gameplay stultifying and the graphics drawn in shades of bland. The people behind it should be flogged until they drop, and anyone who bought it put on public pillory for succumbing to

such an obvious and cynical marketing ploy.

The real insult, however, is that AtariGames is trying the same trick on us again, less than 12 months later. It even has the temerity to brand it 'Best Of Atari', making a mockery of history, philosophy and consumer rights laws in the process. I'm off to compose a letter to my local councillor this very instant...

PCZONE VERDICT

17



Not the Austrian Oak's finest moment.



Like the car, this game is a wreck.

SUDDEN 3 STRIKE

Arms for Victory

A World War II Real-time Strategy Game



Battles for the Pacific Islands



www.fireglowgames.com

FEEDBACK

Will Porter joyfully gathers your thoughts on *Half-Life 2* in a dainty basket, before visiting the big, bad wolf that is Anthony Holden

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed in recent issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. To get your views in print, all you have to do is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than **100 words**. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

HALF-LIFE 2

REVIEWED ISSUE 148
(BY ANTHONY HOLDEN),
SCORE: 97%

What we said

Half-Life 2 is simply the most essential gaming experience of the year, the game the entire FPS genre has been building towards for the past decade, and one of the defining moments of the videogame medium as a whole. Play it, enjoy it, savour it. Games may never get this good again.

What you said

Half-Life 2 has turned out to be the perfect game for me. It's tight like mahogany, and the first level is a revelation in gaming. You never feel patronised by insultingly easy early levels, that tell you how to crouch under some shitty pretence such as 'oh, you've lost your memory', or 'oh, you've been in cryogenic sleep'. Even though you don't speak once, you bond with characters like Alyx and Kleiner, and this is the only game I've played in recent years that implements humour (what cat?) without it being shite one-liners or sounding at all forced.

AkasaReeve

The graphics are good, the characters are excellent, the sound is spot on. There is rarely, if ever, a repetitive moment in *Half-Life 2*. From sprinting through the run-down back alleys of City 17 to driving round the coast in a buggy, there's always something to see or do.

I think the story is brilliant.

I agree it's unfinished, but I still think the story is one of my favourite parts of the game. My only complaint is it's too short. Roll on the expansion packs and *Half-life 3*!

Dan Forever

The graphics, sound and mechanics of the game are incredible, however I can't help feeling it's a little bit too scripted. Take the boat level, for instance. While the boat controls were great fun, I found the bits where you had to get off and run around inexplicably guarded rooms irrelevant and irritating. I would have liked to see a more *Deus Ex* approach to problem solving, with more than one route to each puzzle's solution. This would have made particular sense given Gordon's less than heroic status. He's a lab professor in an orange suit for goodness sake! All in all the game is a lot of fun, however it hasn't proved as unputdownable as I had hoped. Good? Yes, but not the best game ever by a long way.

Simon_Blackwell1

I was worried I had hyped it up too much to myself but it exceeds everything I had hoped for it. All those countless videos and screenshots are nothing to actually experiencing it for yourself. I actually feel truly sorry

for anyone who hasn't played it yet. This is what I have always wanted from games – a totally immersive

experience within a rich world. I'm not really interested in point scoring or unlocking characters or any of that crap – this is what I've wanted from gaming ever since I first heard the squeal of the Spectrum loading, or the first time I entered the first level of *Doom*. I'm heading off now to have Valve's babies and I expect it to be emotional.

Liquid_metal

The preview clips and press releases promised us a marvel of freeform interactivity. What we got was a marvellous, scripted roller

coaster ride. In that respect, *Half-Life 2* really is parallel to *Doom 3* as the 21st-century remake of its parent game, rather than the gaming revolution we

had hoped for. Taking the game on its own merits though, I hardly have a bad word to say about it (excepting the annoying team-mate AI). It certainly deserves its accolades as one of the best games ever made, and I for one am loving nearly every minute of it.

Doomus

I've just finished *Half-Life 2*, and I have to say that I feel rather disappointed with it. There is no doubt that the action in *Half-Life 2* is of the highest calibre with plenty of variety and memorable moments. But the problem I have with the game is the lack of story. Now I'm not expecting much given it's a FPS, but there just seems to be very little explanation for the events in the game. No one ever fills you in on what has happened while you have been away – what's happened to Earth? Have we been conquered by an alien race? If so, where are they? Then there's the ending. I won't give anything away but to me it was a serious anti-climax that left me more than a bit pissed off.

Ardwen

I can't believe something as terrible and shoddy as Steam can firmly ensconce something as fantastic as *Half-Life 2*. It's

like digging through six feet of shit, vomit, bile, syringes, used condoms and decaying flesh to discover a theme park underneath it all! A theme park with naked ladies throwing themselves at you, offering chips! Burger and chips, and little crispy potato things with ketchup and lots of coke and other things I like. At the end of the day, the theme park is all that matters. I'll remember *Half Life 2*, but I'll do my best to forget about Steam.

Escaped Monkey

Ant's comment:

Most of you seem to agree with my view that *Half-Life 2* is one of the most essential and rewarding gaming experiences ever created. The rest of you are just naysayers who either hate games or have no soul. The complaints of a lack of story are so comprehensively idiotic I'm stupefied. Here we are crying out every issue for a game of true subtlety and complexity, and when it arrives you start whining? You want to go back to a time when you

were spoon-fed clichés like an imbecile? Madness. I can understand the accusations of linearity and over-

scripting a little more, but again this is a pointless and churlish complaint. The game is great because it's linear and scripted, not in spite of it. Every moment is perfectly crafted to entertain, and though it doesn't give the same freedoms as real life, here's a little surprise for you – it's a game!

Out of all the whiners, the only person I really feel for is Escaped Monkey, who raises the one real concern with *Half-Life 2*. Forcing people to log on to Steam to play the game is a pain in the arse and has caused major problems for people who've paid good money. We might not like it, but unfortunately Valve can distribute its own game however it wants. [X]

"Half-Life 2 has turned out to be the perfect game for me. It's tight like mahogany, and the first level is a revelation in gaming"

TIGHT LIKE WHAT? TELL US MORE, AKASAREEVE



"Nice bit of wood that, but it's not mahogany."

CORPORAL BIG DADDY

LEFT US FAR
TOO SOON WHEN THE
NUMB NUTS OPERATING THE
KEYBOARD ACCIDENTALLY
HIT THE RELOAD BUTTON
INSTEAD OF THE ONE
FOR GRENADE.

WITHOUT A ZBOARD, YOU'RE TOAST.

IN A GAME LIKE MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT™, YOU HAVE TO MOVE FAST OR DIE. THAT'S WHY YOU NEED ZBOARD™. THE WORLD'S FIRST INTERCHANGEABLE CUSTOM KEYBOARD SYSTEM. ZBOARD'S LIMITED EDITION MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT KEYBOARD IS CUSTOMIZED FOR YOU TO CHANGE WEAPONS FAST, RELOAD, OR JUST GET THE HELL OUT OF THE WAY. NO MORE FUMBLING THROUGH MANUALS OR DROPPING GRENADES WHEN YOU SHOULD BE CROUCHING. WITH ZBOARD'S CUSTOM GRAPHICS AND LABELED COMMANDS, IT'S ALL RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF YOU. IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN EDGE IN MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT, CHECK OUT ZBOARD.COM FOR MORE DETAILS.



AVAILABLE AT:



You can find demo versions of all these games on the DVD. Try 'em then buy 'em.

Indie Zone

ON THE DVD

Big-budget, big-team games are so passé – DIY gaming is where it's at, and to celebrate we've promoted Indie Zone to the reviews section. **Anthony Holden** holds court...

TASKFORCE

■ \$24 (£12.40) | Dev: Cornutopia | www.cornutopia.net



The more you carry the less APs you get, so think carefully about every item.

IT'S DISAPPOINTING, but apart from *UFO: Aftershock* (p29), it looks like it's up to indie developers to carry on the X-COM legacy and keep turn-based tactics alive. *Taskforce* is an ugly but competent attempt to do just that, and though it's rough around the edges, it does have a certain charm.

Indeed, the most difficult thing to get past is the look. The isometric 3D graphics are functional, with stilted animations and basic furnishings. The inelegant interface could use some work too – doing several actions in quick succession can be painful.

Beyond this though, it's surprisingly enjoyable. The gameplay is proven – select a squad, choose weapons and

equipment, spend Action Points to move around a level and dispose of enemies. The 3D levels are simple but well designed, with opportunities for sniping and ambushes that become apparent only with exploration. Further touches include the ability to loot corpses, a robust encumbrance system and some half-decent enemy AI.

The missions are well balanced throughout, and you often scrape through a level with just one unit left – always the most satisfying denouement. If you've fond memories of *X-COM*, give the demo a bash.

PCZONE VERDICT

64



Climb, blast and think your way to freedom.

LITTLE SOLDIERS

■ \$19.95 (£10.25) | Dev: Phelios | www.phelios.com/pc

THE TOP-NOTCH puzzlers just keep coming. Set in a series of dastardly 2D levels, *Little Soldiers* tasks you with guiding a soldier (or soldiers) through a variety of hazards and barriers to an exit. The interface is entirely mouse-driven – you do everything by clicking

icons that appear next to your soldiers, each illustrating an action or movement that can be performed.

Though it's certainly no clone, the *Lemmings* comparisons are inescapable. The tools at your disposal are very similar: you can dig, climb, blast through blocks, set off chain reactions and build new platforms. The difference here is that there's no sense of urgency – your soldiers only move when commanded and you have plenty of time to ponder the solutions.

With only 40 small levels, *Little Soldiers* is a bit thin on content, but it's great fun. With a bit more polish and a slew of new levels, this could be a mainstream hit.

PCZONE VERDICT

74



Could it be any more drab if it tried?

VOID WAR

■ \$19.95 (£10.25) | Dev: Rampant Games | www.rampantgames.com

APPARENTLY, *Void War* has attracted a small online following since its launch in October, but I'm not convinced. If this game was set somewhere other than space, it'd be laughed off the Internet. It's only because space shooters are so rare that anyone cares. As it is, this is the

most basic, featureless and boring 3D shooter imaginable, which just happens to be set in the inky blandness of space.

The gameplay is all about instant-action dog fighting, with basic power-ups and some simple power management. Most of the interest is focused on the

online multiplayer game, which allows a bunch of saddos to blast it out in arenas of simulated nothingness bounded by invisible force fields. Void is right – there's nothing going on here.

PCZONE VERDICT

29



PLUMMIT

■ \$11.95 (£6.15) | Dev: Purplenose Games | www.purplenose.com



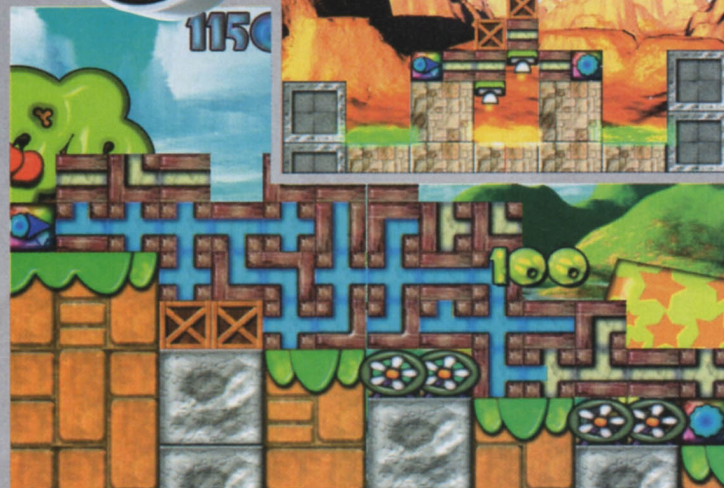
If only shooter developers did puzzles this well.

LOOSELY DESCRIBED

as *Tetris* meets plumbing, *Plummit* is indie development at its finest. Great concept, loads of charm and it's dirt cheap too. With two entirely different play modes on offer, it's also two very clever games in one.

First off you have your *Tetris*-style mode, a frantic arcade affair in which the

aim is to connect a tap to a sink with variously shaped pieces of piping. Unlike *Tetris*, the bricks that drop from the sky are uniform, but each houses a certain shape of pipe that directs the water in different directions. Block the flow and it's game over, permit a leak to spring and it's the same. Matters are complicated by



One of the more ingenious titles we've seen lately.

hazards such as magnets, cannons, collapsing ice, floating platforms and crates as well as a strange dog-like creature that shoots fireballs out of his ears.

The other more leisurely part of the game involves mind-bending plumbing dilemmas, in which you have to construct a series of increasingly ingenious systems with only the blocks at hand. There are some truly devious conundrums here, with more than a hint of the ace *Incredible Machine* games by Dynamix.

Both game modes are superbly devised and executed, with their contrasting tempos complementing each other nicely. With a two-player combat mode and the ability to download free levels after purchase, *Plummit* is a remarkably complete package. And with such a ridiculously low asking price, it's also impossible not to endorse.

PCZONE VERDICT

80

"Plummit has a great concept, loads of charm and it's dirt cheap too"

CACTUS BRUCE AND THE CORPORATE MONKEYS

■ \$19.95 (£10.25) | Dev: Blue Tea Games | www.bluteagames.com



Simple, but a lot more fun than commercial efforts like *Worms Blast*.

THE CONCEPT

is irresistible. Corporate monkeys want to turn an island into a banana republic, and only a one-eyed pirate cactus called Bruce can stop them. The monkeys are armed with coconuts and wrenches, but Bruce has the power of his one-ton claw to stop them and send them to a watery grave.

It might sound deliberately wacky, but *Cactus Bruce* is actually an extremely likeable game with a great sense of arcade fun. Using the extendable claw anchored at the bottom of the screen, the idea is to grab things out of the air and fire

them at the monkeys and their platforms, not stopping until all the platforms are cleared. You can grab the monkeys themselves, bunches of bananas, blowfish and even the occasional low-flying bird, while the claw also acts as a shield against the pelting coconuts.

It's vaguely reminiscent of *Puzzle Bobble* as well as classics like *Missile Command*, but with a definite flavour of its own. If it was at your local chippie you'd have filled it with coins weeks ago.

PCZONE VERDICT

70

I OF THE ENEMY

■ \$19.95 (£10.25) +shipping | Dev: Enemy Technology | www.enemytechnology.com



Defend the warp-gate at all costs.

WHILE WE'D be the last people to suggest that indie developers should stick to puzzle games and 2D shooters, there are clearly limits to how much you can do on a budget that barely covers your pizza spend. To their credit, the folks at Enemy Technology have stretched those limits to the utmost, creating a fully-fledged isometric RTS in the vein of *StarCraft*.

Unfortunately, the limitations of the game become apparent all too readily. Despite excellent presentation that belies the game's indie roots, *I Of The Enemy* simply lacks meat. There are no

resources, the selection of units is scant, the maps are small and the tile-sets repetitive. The gameplay relies largely on managing and mobilising a stream of reinforcements, which arrive on the scene through a warp-gate of sorts. Perhaps more interesting, your artillery units only work effectively in conjunction with forward spotter units. Despite such touches of flair, however, the game is simply not interesting enough to warrant attention.

PCZONE VERDICT

53



SUPERTEST: GAME OF THE YEAR 2004

Martin Korda convenes the ZONE team to find the best game of 2004...

IT'S TIME for the big one. After what's unarguably been the most exciting year in PC gaming history, the PC ZONE team gathered together at a secret location (the pub round the corner) to discuss the eleven best games of the year and decide which one would be crowned Best Game of 2004.

But don't be expecting an endless stream of fawning comments, just

because this month's Supertest contains some of the greatest games ever created. In each case, we've been as critical as possible in order to give you as detailed and balanced an overview of each game as we can.

This year's contest is being fought between a collection of the biggest and most respected names in the industry. In fact, out of the eleven titles here, only

Far Cry and *The Battle For Middle-Earth* aren't connected with an existing franchise. Will they be able to hold their own against such titans as *Half-Life 2*, *Doom 3* and *Rome: Total War*, or will they be swept away by the torrent of sublime sequels we've been lavished with over the past 12 months? There's only one way to find out. Better get the beers in and make yourself comfy...





THE CONTENDERS



DOOM 3
REVIEWED ISSUE 146,
SCORE 90%



EVERQUEST II
REVIEWED ISSUE 150,
SCORE 95%



FAR CRY
REVIEWED ISSUE 140,
SCORE 93%



**FOOTBALL
MANAGER 2005**
REVIEWED ISSUE 149,
SCORE 90%



HALF-LIFE 2
REVIEWED ISSUE 148,
SCORE 97%



**PRO EVOLUTION
SOCCER 4**
REVIEWED ISSUE 149,
SCORE 89%



ROME: TOTAL WAR
REVIEWED ISSUE 148,
SCORE 93%



**THE LORD OF THE
RINGS: THE BATTLE
FOR MIDDLE-EARTH**
REVIEWED ISSUE 149,
SCORE 91%



TOCA RACE DRIVER 2
REVIEWED ISSUE 142,
SCORE 89%



**UNREAL
TOURNAMENT 2004**
REVIEWED ISSUE 138,
SCORE 91%



**VAMPIRE: THE
MASQUERADE -
BLOODLINES**
REVIEWED ISSUE 151,
SCORE 86%

THE JURY



DAVE
'FIRST BLOOD'
WOODS



JAMIE
'BLUNDERBUSS'
SEFTON



PAUL
'NORRATH'
PRESLEY



WILL
'HELLISH'
PORTER



MARTIN
'CAESAR'
KORDA



**STEVE 'THE
MANAGER'**
HILL



ANTHONY
'HALF-LIFE'
HOLDEN



**MICHAEL 'THE
BLOODSUCKER'**
FILBY



SUZY
'POWERSLIDE'
WALLACE

DOOM 3

Will: I really enjoyed it. There are loads of great moments and it's a really fun shooter.

Dave: But if we were to review it again now in light of *Half-Life 2*, I don't think it'd be a classic.

Anthony: Did anyone want to complete it apart from Will? (*Silence all round.*)

Will: The first four hours are really atmospheric.

Dave: But after four hours I didn't want to play anymore.

Ant: I've completed every id game except this one.

Dave: It's definitely one of id's weaker games. But what I love about id is that it's still a really small team of around 22 people, so I reckon it should be commended for creating something as good as this. We might criticise it now, but I still think it's essential if you're into first-person shooters.

Will: It's definitely up there with the best games of the year.

When you start getting a bit bored with it, it introduces a great new monster.

Anthony: That's the problem.

Introducing a new weapon or monster is the most primitive way of making a game interesting.

Will: I don't think it does anything wrong. Some people like this old-school type of shooter and I'm one of them.

Michael: The first hour is great, but after that it becomes deathly dull. If it wasn't called *Doom 3* I don't think people would have rated it so highly.

Steve: We were saying in the last Supertest that it's a completely different type of game from the first two.

Martin: Exactly, you only ever get one or two enemies on screen at a time and for me, that's not what *Doom* is all about. It's not long before the 'open door, shoot monster'

mechanic starts to tire. The engine is good though and some bits are incredibly atmospheric.

Jamie: The worst thing is that it's so relentlessly scary. There's no change in pace, it just gets too much.

Dave: I played it once in the dark when I was hung-over and it was very distressing. I was so scared I had to turn it off. It creates a very unsettling atmosphere.

Suzy: The engine is amazing and it's got loads of atmosphere and tension, but it's too repetitive. It's a glorified tech demo.

FAR CRY

Will: *Far Cry*'s great. I love it and won't hear a bad word said against it.

Dave: *Far Cry* was criminally overlooked in the Golden Joystick Awards. It deserved to win Game Of The Year.

Paul: It stole a lot of *Half-Life 2*'s thunder.

Will: The physics

are amazing.

Suzy: And the AI.

Martin: The biggest and best surprise of the year.

Michael: I was surprised just how good it was. You can approach the levels pretty much any way you want to.

Jamie: I loved the open levels and the fact that you could snipe enemies from miles away. The scale of it was impressive.

"Far Cry's great – I won't hear a word said against it. It's always raising the bar in terms quality"

WILL PORTER SALUTES BEACH LIFE

Dave: My flatmate likes his games and I came back from work one day and he was sitting two inches away from the screen, zoomed in on some enemies. He was just sitting



Far Cry's AI is fiendishly challenging.

there and working out what to do next. There's no way you could do something like that in *Doom 3*.

Paul: It's one of the first and only shooters ever to make proper use of cover and you can actually outflank the enemy.

Martin: If *Far Cry* had been *Half-Life 2*, then I wouldn't have been disappointed.

Will: It continually adds in amazing stuff like the riverboat chase near the end. It's always raising the bar in terms of quality.

Steve: It's the complete antithesis of *Doom*.

Anthony: Yeah, they actually consciously set out to make the opposite of *Doom*. *Doom 3* is indoors with lots of dark corridors, so the developer made *Far Cry* outdoors with huge open levels.

Michael: The volcano level at the end is what *Doom 3* should have been like.

Dave: *Doom* has a real heritage, but id should be making games like *Far Cry*.

Will: In terms of quality and entertainment, games like this have accelerated away from *Doom*.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Dave: This is without a doubt the best multiplayer online shooter ever.

Martin: Definitely.

Dave: *UT2004* came out of nowhere. We all thought it was just going to be an update of *UT2003*, but it ended up being fantastic.

Martin: The vehicles took it to an all-new level. It's perfectly balanced, as much fun outside of the vehicles as it is inside them, and the new game modes are superb.

Anthony: And it's got the best bots in the business.

Martin: Yeah, best enemy AI I've ever seen in a shooter.

Paul: It's the comprehensive shooting package, right down the modding side of it. It's got everything you need.

Dave: *UT2004* has made Epic the online shooter developer.

Martin: And the Unreal engine is so much better and more moddable than the *Doom*



Doom 3's world is dark, shadowy and foreboding.





engine. I really can't see why anyone would choose the *Doom 3* engine over the Unreal one.

Will: Compared to *UT2004*, *Doom 3*'s multiplayer is terrible.

Michael: *UT2003* didn't feel right, but Epic really sorted everything out for *UT2004*. The vehicles are brilliant.

Anthony: The only bad thing about it was that they said you could bring your mods over from 2003 and it didn't happen. But the great thing about it is that it's as much fun playing it on your own against bots as it is playing against other people online.

Suzy: It's got the best vehicles in any shooter. They're really well balanced too.

Martin: You never feel indestructible, even in the biggest vehicles, which is great as that adds hugely to the tension and excitement.

Anthony: It's our favourite online shooter of the year, but not the best shooter of the year. Just imagine if you could combine *Half-Life 2*'s single-player game with *UT2004*'s multiplayer game.

UT2004 is the best online FPS ever.

"UT2004 is without doubt the best multiplayer online shooter ever, and it came out of nowhere"

DAVE WOODS KNOWS GOOD MULTIPLAYER WHEN HE SEES IT

Martin: Genius.

Dave: *UT2004* was such a huge step forward from 2003, and with the new engine the next one should be even better, especially with the new physics engine.

Anthony: The problem is, how does Epic improve on *UT2004*?

Dave: It's all about the physics.

Will: Make it 3D.

Martin: Real-time graphics.

Steve: Add a gravity gun.

Paul: Set it in Leeds.

Martin: Let's move on shall we?

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Steve: I was really absorbed by this game. It took me forever just to get past the tutorial

campaign, but it's brilliant. I'm actually scared to take on an entire main campaign.

Martin: It's superb. Two games in one and they're both brilliant.

Dave: From a non-strategy gamer viewpoint, I prefer playing games like *Command & Conquer: Rome* is just too hardcore for me.

Martin: You need a lot of time and perseverance. There's so much real-life strategy involved in this game that you can be totally outnumbered but still win a battle by using a superior strategy to your opponent.

Steve: How do you know what to do though? How do you work



out what the right tactics are?

Martin: Well, you can read Sun Tzu's *Art Of War* – or you can just play the game and work it out for yourself. It's also all in the manual.

Steve: The manual is bigger than a book though!

Dave: But you can't just pick up *Rome* and instantly be able to play it properly.

Martin: That's the beauty of it, you need to master the tactics and art of war to be successful and that takes time. But *Rome* is so much more accessible than *Medieval*. It lets you drag-select your troops, so ordering your armies is much easier this time.

Jamie: I really like the turn-based map screen – more so than the battles.

Will: Me too. I love all the *Civilization* bits between the battles more than the actual battles themselves.

Anthony: The turn-based map screen was a massive breakthrough. It's a game in its own right. Even though I can see it's brilliant, it doesn't seem like fun having real historical units. They seem really boring compared to units like Tanya from *Command & Conquer*.

Martin: What the *Total War* series does is put the 'strategy' back into RTS. Most RTS games are just about building a big army,



Rome: Total War – the most epic game ever created.



Hardcore? *Rome* is much more accessible than its predecessors.

mass-selecting them and sending them into the enemy base. If you want that kind of mindless action, then play a shooter.

TLOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Martin: If it hadn't been for *Rome*, this would easily have been the best RTS of the year. I've been banging on for years that the old *Command & Conquer* ethos of building an army and mindlessly charging in needed an overhaul, and *The Battle For Middle-Earth* does just that. Finally, you have to use proper tactics to win.

Dave: It's really easy to play as well, which is good for someone like me.

Ant: What, thick?

Dave: I prefer strategically-challenged. The interface has been streamlined and everything's just one or two clicks away now. It's very easy to play.

Will: The attention to detail is amazing, but I'm just too lazy for this sort of game. I really feel like the floating voter who's only turned up so he can see the Balrog...

Martin: Yeah, but there's stuff like Emotion Engine that I really like. Now you can actually see the morale bonuses that the heroes give to nearby troops or see when they're scared of the enemy.

(*Will makes ironic 'Wool' noises.*)
Jamie: Some of the enemies are really meaty as well. Like the trolls that can smash tree trunks into groups of troops and send them flying.

Martin: It's full of great moments like that. The Ents are the best, though the Oliphants come a close second.

Steve: I thought the cavalry charges were the best bits.

Paul: There's nothing quite like one huge army rushing into another in the movies, and this does about as good a job of recreating that as you can.

Michael: And the sound effects and soundtrack make it really atmospheric too.

Martin: If there's one criticism though, it's that some of the base-building missions get a bit repetitive.

Anthony: But that's the nature of this type of game.

Dave: And the AI occasionally stands around when you attack its base.

Martin: You got that from my review!

Paul: *Rome*: *Total War* definitely wins on the tactics and AI front. It's much more of a true 'strategy' game.

Anthony: I thought the siege battles were a lot of fun.

Martin: They're definitely the game's best moments, though Helm's Deep could have done with being a bit more epic.

Suzy: I love it when you're defending a castle and you see hordes of enemies marching towards you. You actually feel scared.

Dave: Attacking a castle is great

too, but getting the ladders to the walls can be a bit fiddly.

Jamie: I'd still rather play *Half-Life 2*.

Will: If they had guns, then I'd probably care more.

Martin: Shut up Will. It's a fantastic game with a couple of flaws. *Command & Conquer* has finally come of age. In any other year, this would have been in my top two. Anyone who thinks *TBFME* is anything but brilliant is just plain wrong.

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

Steve: Can I shock you?

I don't play it.

Dave: Why?

Steve: For the same reason I don't smoke crack.

(*Laughter.*)

Steve: It's a brilliant game and the best one yet, but that kind of addiction to a game is something I don't want in my life anymore. It's a 12-stage plan. I will beat it and I am happy. There are times when I used to play it for 12 hours at a time. That part of my life is over.

Michael: I don't like football and *FM2005* feels like a spreadsheet.

Steve: It's not like a spreadsheet. I've used spreadsheets and found them to be nightmare. *FM2005* is far more intuitive. You can't score goals on a spreadsheet.

Martin: I think it's the one game here that doesn't need flashy graphics to be good. It's so immersive, so detailed and so addictive. As Steve's proved, it



Football Manager 2005, the true successor to *Champ Man 03/04*.

can totally take over your life.

You'd think you'd eventually get sick of it, but you just don't.

Dave: I'd rather play a game like *PES* where I can live out the dream of playing football.

Martin: But people who want to play *FM2005* want to be managers, not players. That's why they play it.

Dave: I do think it's the pinnacle of its genre.

Steve: I think it's in a genre of its own. It's head and shoulders above all the other football management games, which are all shallow by comparison.

Dave: It would have been great if *Champ Man 5* had come out at the same time so we could have had a head-to-head between them.

Jamie: *Champ Man 5* is noticeable by its absence.

Martin: Even though *FM2005* is the best version yet, I don't think the new 'mind game' feature works very well. It feels really tacked on. You've got all these choices about what to say about the opposition, but no matter what you say, your players either think you're being a wimp or too harsh.

Steve: Yeah, the developer had been banging on about the mind games forever. I just don't use that option.

Anthony: It's a symptom of releasing the same game every year. You have to find a new gimmick somewhere.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Jamie: It's the most addictive and accurate representation of football ever.

Anthony: You can't vote for it as your game of the year because you never play it on the PC.

Suzy: Yes he does. He plays it all the time.

Steve: Jamie almost started an international incident when playing this game on a press trip. He refused to shake the German team's hands after they beat us on penalties.

Dave: The whole thing with *PES4* is that you don't really play it as a single-player game.

Martin: But while it's brilliant on the PC, I don't think any of us would choose to play the PC version above the PS2 one.

Dave: If we were voting for the game by the amount we play it and how much we enjoy it, then *PES4* would be streets ahead of the competition. But we're not and it's certainly not the best game of the year.

Steve: The data is all wrong. The developer blamed deadlines for getting the player stats wrong.

But it's still the best football game ever. Even John Hare who made *Sensible Soccer* thinks it's the best footy game ever made.

Martin: Unlike *FIFA*, it actually feels like you're playing football.

Dave: Absolutely.

Martin: Saying that though, there are still loads of moments when the ball doesn't go where you want to pass it. Sometimes it even goes in the opposite direction, which can be really frustrating...

Jamie: And the morale system is all wrong.

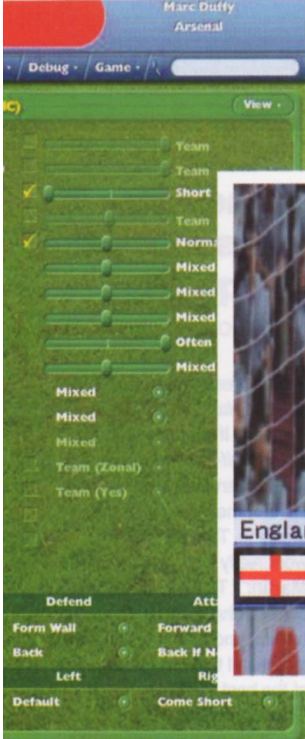
Suzy: I think any game that makes a senior member of the team shout the 'C' word so the whole office can hear is good...

Dave: Along with *Quake III*, it's the game that generates the most amount of passion in you.

Steve: The games are so watchable. When we went to France for the launch of the game, everyone was watching the games on the big screen as though they were watching real football. I went to the *FIFA*



The Battle For Middle-Earth melds hardcore and mainstream RTS gameplay into one package.



will probably appeal to the masses though – it strikes a happy balance between arcade and simulation.

Dave: It's the one driving game I've played this year that's made me feel really, really excited when I've played it. You really feel like you're in a race.

Martin: And all of the vehicles handle really differently.

Jamie: I like the hilly course.

paying your flatmate to play these games for you?

Steve: You've been using him as a ****ing guinea pig... (Laughter all round.)

Dave: He's been playing it loads, but he's stuck on the F1 cars. It's just too difficult. There's a fine line between sim and arcade, and on occasion it's a little bit too hard and in danger of being a niche product.

"It's taken the genre to the next level – whatever you want to do in a MMORPG, you can do here"

PAUL PRESLEY HAS BEEN DRAWN INTO EVERQUEST II

(Jamie moves his hand in an undulating motion, causing laughter.)

Will: There's a great damage model too. It really affects how the car handles when you get your car smashed up.

Suzy: The one criticism I have of TOCA is that when you get to the later stages of the game, the difficulty level sky-rockets and it becomes really hard just to finish in the top ten.

Dave: Actually, I can bring in my flatmate here again.

Martin: Have you been

Anthony: It tries to do a bit of everything.

Steve: It's just intense racing.

EVERQUEST II

Dave: I'm hooked. It's the most addictive thing on the planet.

Martin: But how long will you stay addicted? The problem with all games like this is that they drip-feed you your enjoyment

over a very long period of time and *EverQuest II* is no exception.

Dave: The beauty of it is that as soon as you get bored, you get moved onto something new and more exciting. It's simple, yet addictive.

Suzy: It's another world, another life.

Martin: It often feels like a glorified chatroom to me.

Paul: The reason why I scored it so high is that it's taken the genre to the highest level that it can be at with current technology.

Martin: Which is?

Paul: It encapsulates the whole online experience where you spend hours and hours immersed in another world. Whatever you want to do in a MMORPG, you can do here.

Will: But doesn't *World Of Warcraft* do that too?

Paul: *WoW* aims more for instant gratification, while *EverQuest II* has more lasting appeal. Everything that *WoW* does, *EverQuest II* does too.

Anthony: It's still for saddos though isn't it? (Laughter.)

Suzy: A lot of people who loved the first *EverQuest* refuse to play this one.

Paul: That's because of all the time that they've invested into it, rather than any failing on the part of *EQII*. Everything is so much more immediate in *EverQuest II*. Right from the start, you're given guilds and magic, which make it much easier to get into.

Dave: Thanks to *EverQuest II*, I've learnt how to fish. I've never caught a fish in real life.

Suzy: It takes up too much of your time. You can't just dip into it.

Steve: It's for weirdos and hippies.

Jamie: I just don't see the point of delivering swords to dwarves for money.

Dave: MMORPGs are starting to move into the mainstream, but while I found *WoW* really accessible, *EverQuest II* is still a little niche.

Anthony: The whole concept of MMORPGs is flawed.

Dave: But I've not played any other game here as much as this one and *World Of Warcraft*. I played *Doom* for four hours, *Half-Life* for ten hours...

Martin: Your flatmate played all of the other games for 20 hours...

Dave: And I've played this one for about 40 hours.

Anthony: But it's only addictive because it drip-feeds you your enjoyment. You're not enjoying it, you're just anticipating the next bit of enjoyment when you get a new item or something.

Dave: No way. The other day I helped someone out and they typed 'Thnx' and I typed 'NP' back to them and I felt really good about myself. (Sniggers all round.)

Martin: And on that bombshell...

HALF-LIFE 2

Anthony: It's genius.

Dave: I think if we're being ultra-critical, *Half-Life 2* is the best shooter ever but it feels like the whole game is ushering you down a set path. The big difference is that *Far Cry* was as good and ground-breaking as *Half-Life 2*.

Martin: I don't think *Far Cry* is as good, but *Half-Life 2* certainly did surprise me by just how linear it was. It's by far the best and most immersive shooter I've ever played, but I'd have liked it if something else other than just the accuracy



TOCA 2 and its lean, green racing machine.



Do you think we should tell him his sword is on fire? Nah.



Half-Life 2's enemies are brilliantly imagined and hugely diverse.

of my shot had played a part in my survival.

Steve: I can't fault the game.

Anthony: *Far Cry* was fun, but *Half-Life 2* is so far ahead of the rest, mostly because the whole world works with the storyline and characters to build this incredible immersion. The gameplay is linear, but the way it builds the atmosphere of the world is superb.

Will: It's like playing the ultimate action movie.

Paul: It never feels contrived, it's so well written. It could easily be a very, very good film.

Martin: The script is superb, especially the way it seamlessly blends in with the world.

Steve: It's almost like entering a new dimension, there are so many things you can do. And you can do anything you want.

Martin: It's like a playground in which you can kill people. It's utterly engrossing.

Jamie: It leads you by the hand a bit, but that's no bad thing.

Steve: Because the game's scripted, you never feel like you're missing anything, and with a game this good you don't want to be...

Dave: It is a bit too linear though.

Will: That's like complaining about *Die Hard* being too linear.

Anthony: Saying it's linear is a non-criticism. If it wasn't linear it would be boring. Take *Stalker* for

example, which is trying to be totally freeform. With something like that, if something interesting happens then it's just luck.

Dave: I think we'll look back at *HL2* and say it was brilliant for its time, but was only just one step along the road of FPS evolution. *Half-Life 2* is as good as a shooter can get using current FPS conventions, but maybe it's time developers looked into breaking those conventions and found new ways of making shooters even better.

Martin: Definitely. The genre as a whole has to take stock and move on from its restrictive conventions and find new ways of extending itself. *Half-Life 2* has led the way, and I think it will be a very long time till we see another FPS of its scope and quality.

"Half-Life 2 has led the way - it'll be a long time till we see another FPS of its scope and quality"

MARTIN KORDA GOES GA-GA FOR GORDON

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

Dave: We all thought the game was finished and Troika was waiting for *Half-Life 2* to be released, but it clearly wasn't.

There's no excuse for a game to be this buggy. But saying that, if you get into it, it's brilliant.

Will: It's a brave, intelligent and entirely worthy attempt at a first-person RPG.

Martin: The third-person combat is a bit dodgy, but the first-person combat is very good and you really feel as though your stats are playing a part in how well you can handle each weapon. It takes a few hours to really get going, but once it does, the storyline and script are fantastic, as are all the sub-plots. There's so much to discover.

Will: It's the best *Deus Ex* game since *Deus Ex*.

Martin: There are loads of things you can do in *Vampire* that you can't do in *Half-Life 2*, like deviate from the main story, but in terms of polish and

overall presentation, it falls well short of *Half-Life 2*'s quality.

Michael: If ever a game was nearly *Half-Life 2*, this is it. If it had had another six months of development it would've been amazing. The bits that work, work really well.

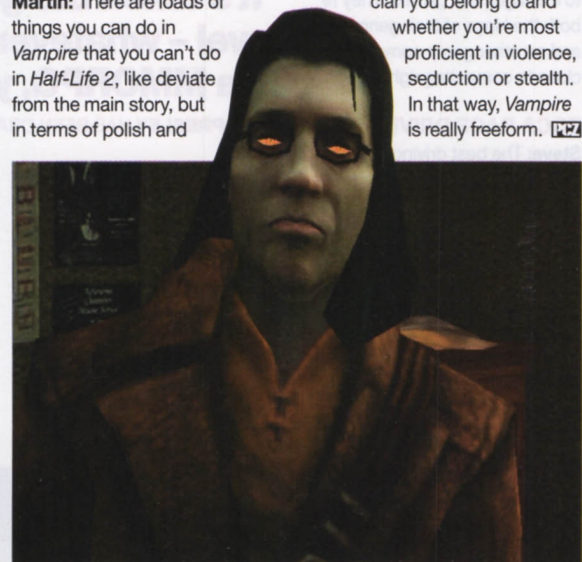
Martin: If Troika had had the same technology as was used on *HL2* and utilised it like Valve did, then I think we'd be looking at the best RPG ever.

Dave: If it'd taken out the bugs too, then we'd be looking at a genre-defining moment.

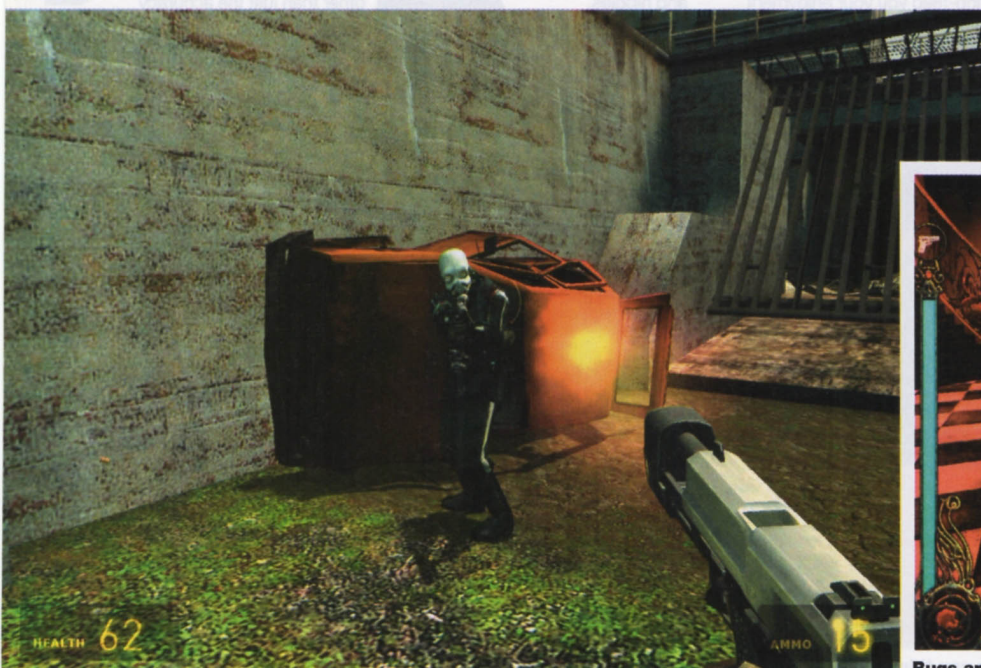
Michael: For a game like this to have spelling errors is not on.

Anthony: I love the fact that you can play all the different clans of vampires. Each one lets you play the game in a slightly different way.

Martin: You can approach every level in a different way depending on what vampire clan you belong to and whether you're most proficient in violence, seduction or stealth. In that way, *Vampire* is really freeform. **[E2]**



Cheer up love, it's not that bad...



Bugs and some dodgy third-person combat keep *Vampire* from greatness.

AND THE WINNER IS... HALF-LIFE 2



IT'S SHOOTERS ALL THE WAY AS HALF-LIFE 2 TRIUMPHS

Half-Life 2 has been like a breath of fresh air for both the shooter genre and the games industry, providing a high level of detail and immersion as well as bringing real human emotion into games. "HL2 takes games as we know them as far as they can go," said Dave. "Of all the games here, it's the one I'll play over again," added Steve.

Jamie was just as enthused: "It's everything I've ever wanted from the sequel." Suzy agreed: "The most intense, roller coaster experience I've had from a game this year." Michael concurred:

"It's head and shoulders above every other game."

Anthony kept it brief: "It's genius," while Will said it's the game that "thrilled me the most".

Paul first voted for *EverQuest II* as his winner, but switched to *HL2*: "They're both breaking new ground, but more people will play *HL2* than *EQII*."

Martin was the only exception, voting for *Rome: Total War*. "There's virtually nothing separating these two – they both redefine their genres and they're the two best games I've ever played. However, *Rome* just edges it for replayability value."

OUR VERDICT

THE SCORES ON THE DOORS

| JURY | WINNER (3PTS) | 2ND PLACE (2PTS) | 3RD PLACE (1PT) |
|---------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| DAVE | HALF-LIFE 2 | FAR CRY | UT2004 |
| STEVE | HALF-LIFE 2 | PES4 | FM2005 |
| JAMIE | HALF-LIFE 2 | PES4 | FAR CRY |
| SUZY | HALF-LIFE 2 | FAR CRY | UT2004 |
| MICHAEL | HALF-LIFE 2 | FAR CRY | ROME |
| ANTHONY | HALF-LIFE 2 | FAR CRY | UT2004 |
| PAUL | HALF-LIFE 2 | EVERQUEST II | ROME |
| WILL | HALF-LIFE 2 | FAR CRY | FM2005 |
| MARTIN | ROME | HALF-LIFE 2 | VAMPIRE |

| POSITION | GAME | POINTS |
|----------|-----------------------------|--------|
| 1ST: | HALF LIFE 2 | 26 PTS |
| 2ND: | FAR CRY | 11 PTS |
| 3RD: | ROME: TOTAL WAR | 5 PTS |
| 4TH: | PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4 | 4 PTS |
| 5TH: | UT2004 | 3 PTS |
| 6TH: | EVERQUEST II | 2 PTS |
| 6TH: | FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 | 2 PTS |
| 8TH: | VAMPIRE | 1 PT |
| 9TH: | TOCA RACE DRIVER 2 | 0 PTS |
| 9TH: | THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH | 0 PTS |
| 9TH: | DOOM 3 | 0 PTS |

OVER TO YOU

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN AND THE VOTES ARE IN...



Half-Life 2's your winner too? No surprise there then.

We've had our say, now it's over to you. Whatever your thoughts and opinions, jump onto www.pczone.co.uk to register your vote and leave your comments – just like this lot did...

Half-Life 2 looks beautiful, plays better and feels right.

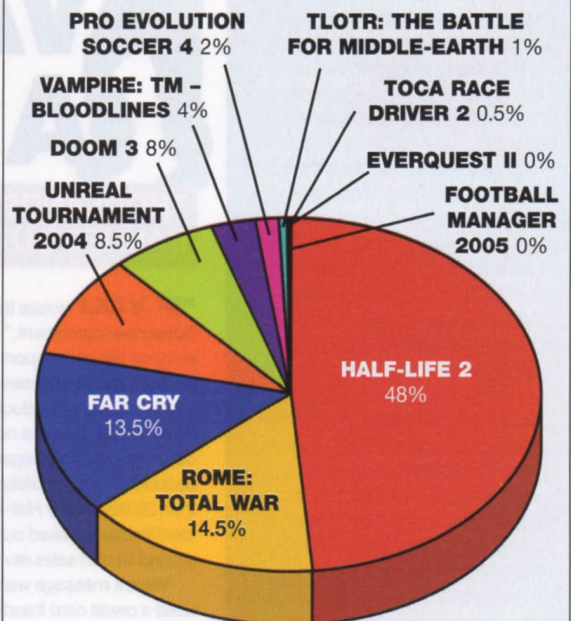
moomocow8 thinks *HL2* rocks

Rome wins – I'll still be playing it long after *Half-Life* is finished.

goattail favours strategy over guns

Far Cry is a ground-breaking game – it gave me that buzz...

Corporate_sniper felt the earth move while playing *Far Cry*



READER VOTES

Due to the larger than usual selection of games in this month's Supertest, we gave you two votes: one for your top game of 2004 and one for your runner-up. Using a complex equation where your first choice counted as 2pts and your second choice as 1pt, we've managed to extrapolate the following results...

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| ■ HALF-LIFE 2 |48% |
| ■ ROME: TOTAL WAR |14.5% |
| ■ FAR CRY |13.5% |
| ■ UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 |8.5% |
| ■ DOOM 3 |8% |
| ■ VAMPIRE: TM - BLOODLINES |4% |
| ■ PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4 |2% |
| ■ TLOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH |1% |
| ■ TOCA RACE DRIVER 2 |0.5% |
| ■ EVERQUEST II |0% |
| ■ FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 |0% |

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

MAKE IT HAPPEN



■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ New Year is always such a taxing time. Not only is there the annual culling of one's manservants to contend with (good help is ever harder to find these days), but there is also the fallout from the various family gatherings, community activities and direct-action protests (and subsequent jail and courtroom action) that one finds oneself attending as the season of goodwill draws on.

As another log is thrown onto the roaring fire (bless you, Mellors), one can't help but muse on the year to come, especially regarding MMOs. Whilst compiling this Best Of 2005 issue, I was struck not only by how many are set to unleash themselves upon mankind in the coming 12 months, but also how rigidly they all stick to the tried and tested *EverQuest* template (regardless of their actually setting). Even the perennial *Dungeons & Dragons Online* looks set to be a rehash of the familiar, despite its notions of 'story'.

So I suspect it's up to us. Which is where the PCZ 'Inner Circle' comes in (you'd thought I'd forgotten hadn't you? Tut tut). This year I want to see you emerging as the true creative powerhouse in the MMO genre. I want to see you subverting the games, using the engines against themselves to turn clichéd environs into inspired spaces of free thought. The best efforts may even win prizes.

Anyhow, that's for the future. I should perhaps be returning my thoughts to the here and now, as the fire looks to be burning quite happily now without need for further intervention, and unless we make our escape soon the local constabulary will turn up and I'll never be able to convince them that this courthouse just burnt itself down. Tshaw, the lengths I go to for an easy life.



The best FPS ever, and still some refuse to pay.

VALVE BLOWS A GASKET

THOUSANDS OF DODGY STEAM ACCOUNTS BANNED BUT PIRATES STAY ONE STEP AHEAD

"IF YOU violate the Steam Subscriber agreement," warns the latest entry on Valve's support FAQ, "your account can be permanently disabled and you will lose any products registered to it." As if to prove this was no idle threat, the developer recently began culling Steam accounts from its database – in all, more than 20,000 hooky *Half-Life 2* installs were identified and locked out, representing around \$1m in sales revenue.

Valve's message was clear: if you've used a credit card fraudulently, stolen other people's account details, used a hacked version of the game, or have

acted in any way the company deems to be in violation of its EULA (End User License Agreement), you'll find yourself permanently barred from City 17.

The majority of users caught by this particular clampdown had used a spurious CD key which allowed them to play *Half-Life 2* without paying for it. Valve was aware that a serial number had been circulating piracy sites and forums around the time of the game's launch, but a simple database query was all that was needed to find out who was using it. The company dismissed allegations of entrapment and ignored 'Big Brother'



This battle may not be so simple...

comments, some people likening Valve's actions to those of Freeman's adversaries.

But while it may appear that pirates' days are numbered, within hours of *Half-Life 2*'s release copies of the game were circulating that didn't require a Steam account to play, and news from the underground is that cracked versions of Steam itself are available for download. These bastardised copies of Valve's content delivery platform behave in the same way as the real McCoy, but they never connect to servers and never ask for your credit card.

In essence, the fake program pretends to be a Steam Client. It streams data from the game's cache files – files that were made freely available by Valve on the assumption they could only be unlocked by paid-up Steam users. "Through our custom built emulator, you can play *Half-Life 2*," is the text accompanying one such release. And it gets worse. "Any Source Engine game can be played."

How Valve will deal with this new threat is as yet unclear, because it's impossible for them to track who's using it. With hacked copies limited to offline play, there's simply no way of knowing – those 20,000 could be the tip of the iceberg.

STEAM

Steam delivers Valve's games to your desktop and connects you to a massive gaming community. Check out the full [feature list](#) now.

GET STEAM NOW!

NEWS GET STEAM NOW CYBER CAFE'S SUPPORT FORUMS STATUS

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Latest News

HL2DM, Source SDK, Source Engine Update Released

Half-Life 2: Deathmatch, Source SDK, and Source Engine updates are available and will be added to automatically when Steam

Technical Support

Questions, Answers, Etc...

Cyber Cafe Licensing

Games Your Customers Want...

Get Steam Now

Sign Up and Play Games Today!

The whole idea of Steam was to curb piracy and control sales. Has it failed?



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The best MMOs on the radar

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Star Wars expansion blasts off

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NEVERQUEST
Full circle as Steve Hill does EQII

MMO Sales, MMO Money

WOW AND EQII MAKE IMPRESSIVE NOISES AT RETAIL**World Of Warcraft: selling shitloads.**

WITH THE two biggest names in MMO gaming heading to retail in the US recently, both Blizzard and Sony Online were quick to report successes. Blizzard had far and away the better time of it during its first week, notching up nearly a quarter of a million sales on its first day alone – making it the most successful PC game launch ever. By the end of that first day, some 200,000 of those customers had created characters and over

100,000 were logged as playing it concurrently, filling all of the 40 servers to capacity and requiring a further 40 to be opened during the week.

EverQuest II meanwhile, despite Sony not releasing any official numbers, was thought not to be too far behind. One thing SOE did divulge was that the sequel had surpassed the original game's first-month figures in less than two days, and had seen its initial roster of 12 servers also doubled.

How *WOW* will fare in its Europe debut remains to be seen, although pre-orders are already through the roof. *EQII* has, of course, got the jump on Blizzard's title in this respect, though following a debut at number three in the UK charts (highest ever for a MMOG), Sony saw the game slip to 19th place in just two weeks. Mind you, this battle is a long-term affair and there's plenty yet to fight for.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?

**Warning: Nobuyuki Forces can be habit-forming.**

NOBUYUKI FORCES 3

(www.skt-products.com/contents/nobu3rd.html)

Nobuyuki Forces is a classy series of browser-based shooting games by Japanese Flash boffins SKT. While not their latest game, *Nobuyuki Forces 3* is something of a classic of the form, cramming both style and substance into its minimal line-art environments.

The basic blueprint is *Time Crisis*, which, for the benefit of cave dwellers and newborns is one of the all-time classic arcade light-gun games. It introduced the excellent 'hit and hide' system, whereby you could lean in and out of cover using a foot pedal. *Nobuyuki Forces 3* uses the same basic principle with the spacebar, but adds the key ingredient of combos to restore the challenge and lift the game above the many similar efforts.

Basically, the more shots you land in quick succession – be it on one target or several – the bigger the combo and the more points (and power-ups) you get.

There's also a strong whiff of *Metal Gear* in the game's presentation – you can even unlock a selection of new outfits for your character à la Tuxedo Snake. These are gained by earning 'titles', awarded for high combos, beating bosses and so forth. With 23 of these to collect, plus three levels of difficulty, there's plenty to do here – and take it from us, you'll definitely be back for more.

**Combos restore the challenge that's lost with mouse control.**

WIN! LINEAGE II DELUXE EDITION

Five copies of NCSoft's massively popular, massively multiplayer RPG to be won



THE HEADLINES may be dominated by *EverQuest II* and *World Of Warcraft* right now, but when it comes to players, they'll both be hard pushed to beat the millions already packing out the online fantasy world of *Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle*.

Admittedly they're mostly all in Korea and the US, but with NCSoft's UK headquarters releasing the game to a European crowd (full review next issue), we've managed to conduct a guild raid on their storage bins and emerge with five copies of the game to give away.

To enter the draw, simply answer the following question:

Which of the following is NOT a playable race in *Lineage II*?

A: Dark Elf B: Dwarf C: Duck

Send your answer before Thursday February 2 on the back of a postcard or envelope to: Lineage II Competition, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, London, W1U 6FP. For full competition terms and conditions, see page 7.

CLAN DIARY

SCEE

SCEE

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy
www.scee-clan.co.uk

I write this just hours after a humiliating 61 to -1 defeat in the PC ZONE/Jolt Painkiller tournament. Thank goodness then for Counter-Strike, with which I can redeem myself somewhat! This result does, however, mark another failure for the SCEE clan following our disappointing performance at the 5th Unicon Cup, in which we failed to make it out of the group stages.

Never to be outdone, SCEE Ladies regulars Happy-Bunny and Mia returned to Manchester in the following weeks to participate in one of Unicon's regular 2v2 tournaments.

The ladies placed a very competent third, but were considered winners by many after convincing the lads from Moofins (the winners) to drive them home - a two hour detour!

Aside from these activities, many of the SCEE camp, and indeed the gaming community at large, have been keeping themselves occupied with Half-Life 2. While C-S: Source still plays much like the previous beta, HL2 is one of the

"Half-Life 2's deathmatch element, if properly developed by Valve, could well become the next big duelling game"



Will the SCEE Ladies move to C-S Source?

most gripping games I've played. Most definitely worth the wait, if only to throw cans of drink at security guards at the beginning.

The deathmatch element, if properly developed by Valve (competition mods, anyone?) could well become the next big duelling game for the clan-gaming scene (at least until Quake IV). However, Valve may find it more profitable to focus on the development of C-S: Source, as the general consensus in the community is that Half-Life 2: Deathmatch is rather random.

However, getting teams to switch to C-S: Source from the current C-S 1.6 will be a task in itself. Condition Zero, despite its WCG backing, didn't gain many fans. Valve will have to work extra hard to get players to change their game - I know my team won't be switching in a hurry.

That's not to say we never will, however! C-S is changing, so they say, to become more 'noob friendly.' This is often viewed as a bad thing, but I don't believe it should be. The game needs an injection of something new, and Source seems the most logical step. We will see what happens.



Legions boasts the shiniest canals in the business.



And the best giant rooster-crabs, come to that.

ASHERON'S CALLING AGAIN

FIRST OFFICIAL EXPANSION PACK FOR AC2 DUE IN THE SPRING

DESPITE NEVER really making the headlines in the way that, say, EverQuest II or World Of Warcraft managed, Asheron's Call 2 has managed to garner a sizeable (and faithful) audience since its 2002 launch, mainly due to publisher Turbine Games' monthly 'episodic' content updates.

Now, for the first time since Turbine purchased the franchise from Microsoft at the end of 2003, the game is getting a major expansion pack, Legions, providing adventurers with an entirely new continent to explore.

The mysterious lost continent of Knorr (no relation to the tinned soup manufacturers) provides new monsters, loot and challenges for players from level 35 all the way up to level 70. There will also be a new playable race to get to grips with - the mystical Empyreans, an outcast group of magicians that have spent the last 1,000 years hiding from an invading force of insectoids (apparently the local branch of Rentokil was shut for the afternoon and one thing led to another).

Legions also promises to introduce a new 'hero' skill

system, rewarding your acts in combat with new abilities and tactics. Mainly for high level (50 and above) players, 'hero skills' can be combined among players to devastating effect, much like the Heroic Opportunity wheel in EverQuest II.

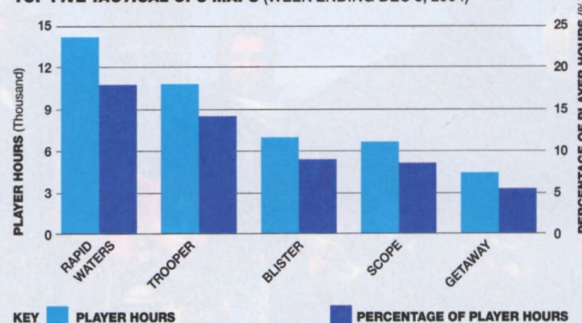
Scheduled for a spring 2005 launch, Legions will be a retail product that comes complete with the original Asheron's Call 2 game and a free month of play for new and existing subscribers alike.

STATZONE

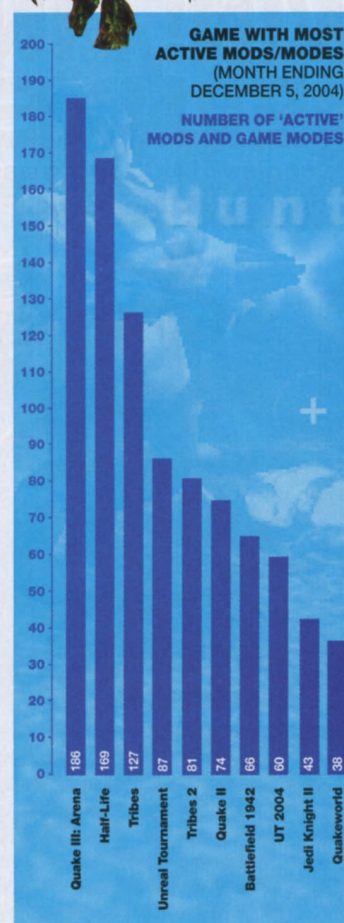
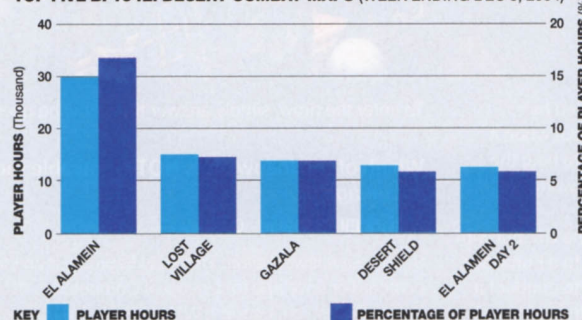
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: CSPTS.NET

TOP FIVE TACTICAL OPS MAPS (WEEK ENDING DEC 5, 2004)



TOP FIVE BF1942: DESERT COMBAT MAPS (WEEK ENDING DEC 5, 2004)





WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

Dana Massey – Wish

“We hand-craft every inch of our game world. Literally, we have to pay attention to every blade of grass, every pebble and every grain of sand”


DANA MASSEY WISH

IRONICALLY, one of the biggest dangers when creating a large-scale fantasy world is the temptation to rely too heavily on the ‘fantastical’. It’s all well and good having your mystical realms and invisible dragon lairs and that, but if your populace can’t tell a weapons shop from an evil temple of doom, it’s not going to be much use to them.

“In general, we make a point to ensure that the world is a medieval, low-fantasy setting. We’re not building floating cities or other elements of high fantasy,” says Dana Massey, world designer for *Wish*. “A chief concern of ours is to avoid alienating players by making a world so foreign that they can’t relate to it. Personally, I’m much more interested in gritty, plausible fantasy, and our world reflects this. Many of the monster and location designs around the gameworld of Ganedan are influenced by extensive historical research on the part of our design team.”

The work going into Mutable Realms’ self-described ‘ultra’ massively multiplayer online role-playing game is impressive, considering the scope. The ultra refers to *Wish*’s ability to host over 10,000 simultaneous players on a single server in a seamless zone-free world. This is something Massey is painfully aware of: “I’m excited to say that we hand-craft every inch of our game world,

but such a statement is also more than a little daunting. Literally, we have to pay attention to every blade of grass, every pebble and every grain of sand. With so many variables interacting, the toughest part of crafting a world is ensuring that all the details come together into one perfect entity. It’s easy to lay out a town, decorate the buildings and paint in roads. It’s not so easy, especially with so many people working on different aspects of a single area, to coordinate such a task on a large scale.”

One such example is the human capital city of Talus. Massey describes it as a true city in terms of size: “With hundreds of buildings occupying an enormous expanse of land, Talus takes on a life of its own. There are many interesting sights within, such as an enormous temple at the heart of the city and a royal compound in the south-west district. There’s also an extensive labyrinth of catacombs that twist and spiral beneath it; a dungeon within a city. All of this exists in our fully seamless game world, with no need to stop and load.” Book your tourist passes now. 

■ **Publisher:** Mutable Realms, Inc
 ■ **Developer:** Mutable Realms, Inc
 ■ **ETA:** Late 2005 ■ **Website:** www.wishgame.com

★★★★★
PCZONE
PRESENTS THE
BIGGEST
PC GAMES OF
2005
★★★★★



Parties are essential for completing many quests.



Die and you go to a ghostly version of the WOW world.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Blizzard | www.blizzard.com/wow

Rhianna Pratchett puts Blizzard's baby to the test



I'LL ADMIT that prior to entering the beta for *World Of Warcraft*, the game hadn't reached out its scaly hands, shaken me roughly and shouted "You must play me!" through Orcish halitosis breath. It seemed too simplistic; a mite bit cuties around the edges and an enormously lengthy client download didn't help either.

Now my level 28 Rogue (as of writing), my level 15 Paladin and all the other characters I've tried out, are a virtual all-singing, all-dancing chorus to the fact that I was wrong. Well, sort of. *World Of Warcraft* certainly is a less hardcore MMORPG than the current offerings, but you know something? It works. Like with so many of its games, Blizzard has taken some simple ideas and executed them beautifully.

THE GREAT WAR

Currently Blizzard is providing both non-PvP and PvP beta servers for Europe. The main difference being that the war between the Alliance and the Horde is



Cooking is a handy secondary skill.

intensified in PvP so that you're free to indulge the age-old *Warcraft* battle, with certain limitations from territory to territory.

Already the PvP server is proving to be very popular, and certainly it's one aspect of MMORPGs that players are taking very seriously at the moment. The game's chat window constantly updates to tell you which territory is being attacked, and chats are full of 'Level 32 Troll Shaman on the Long Wash'-type alerts.

However, there are still a few problems that are proving rather annoying to beta players. The first is corpse-camping where your enemy stands over your dead body and kills you when you resurrect. The second is the fact that on the appropriate territory any level of

ETA
Q1
2005



They'll always be a place for inappropriate clothing in role-playing games.

character is free to attack any other level of character. Although there's an unwritten code that it's strictly not cricket to attack newbies, many low levellers have found themselves being killed just because they happened to wander into the wrong place. There's the breaks you might say, but since *WOW* is trying to attract more of a casual audience, making things a bit more comfortable for newcomers would be welcome.

SPIT AND POLISH

Nevertheless despite the fact that it's still in beta, *World Of Warcraft* is remarkably stable with an unprecedented level of content. There's still a bit of bug hunting going on, but it really feels like a finished game. It's a

stable and seamless world, and that's exactly the right image a MMORPG needs to attract newcomers. There are lots of little details to love, like the way Orcs dance like MC Hammer's backing troupe, the giant mechanical chickens, the in-game auction and postal service, and the view you have from the back of a gryphon as you soar over the landscapes. Blizzard has certainly taken its time making sure that *World Of Warcraft* is as good as it can be. It's the company's ten-year-old baby after all, and now definitely isn't the time to be pushing it recklessly into the wilderness with just a stick and some sandwiches. If the state of the beta is anything to go by, then it has more than lived up to its reputation. *EverQuest II* beware! [X]



At least somebody's happy.



Wait till you see level three!



TABULA RASA

■ Pub: NCsoft | Dev: NCsoft | www.playtr.com

Setbacks be damned! Russ Fischer gently prods Lord British for an update

ETA
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2005

RARE EXCEPTIONS

aside, game development troubles are kept quieter than a case of royal herpes. Guess that qualifies *Tabula Rasa* as a 'rare' title. Earlier this year the team suffered a fairly public meltdown. Originally announced for winter 2004/05, the game ran into trouble with 'modifications and refinements'. That intentionally vague statement bodes ill, but more telling were the actions of executive producer Richard 'Lord Bloody British' Garriott, who installed himself as lead designer in the wake of departures by former designer Carly Staehlin and other team members.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Pressed on the current state of development, Garriott was succinct: "We are in the long push for sufficient content quantity. MMOs need a large amount of content, so that's our focus now." Sounds suspiciously like a total tear-down, but Garriott wouldn't be drawn on anything more specific. "While the subject, back story, and missions have remained largely the same, we have made some structural adjustments to how these missions are accessed and how the players perceive the results. These changes are linked to large battlefield spaces, which I'll discuss more at a later date." Based on other isolated comments made by Garriott and the *TR* team, we project that those "battlefield spaces" will be more constant, changing the background conflict into a foreground issue.



"You make me feel like dancing... And killing!"

With key minds in design, programming and art out the door, expect to see some obvious differences from what we last viewed at E3. "The biggest change has come in the area of player costume. We felt the previous costume direction did not create an 'aspirational fantasy' that players would want to embody. So, we have done some major rework in that area."

Does that mean more hardcore? Tinfoil trousers? Good questions all, but apparently the idea is that players begin with fairly everyday gear and abilities before powering up via the influence of the Benefactors, the interstellar race who have bestowed technology and power upon the player's race. Costume changes seem superficial, but these seem to point to greater shifts in the underlying design – the better to convey a sense of intergalactic war.

HARDCORE WAR

Garriott was most pointed when discussing the game's role in the MMO market. "Most MMOs still

target the core of devoted players who can spend 40-plus hours a month, and scare off players who can only afford half that or less. These are avid gamers who are looking for the advantages of playing with others in a persistent space, while also looking to achieve in ways previously found only in solo player games."

Hardcore it is, then. No *EverQuest II* pussyfooting around here. But beta is still a speck on the horizon, leaving a hard and fast release date a fever dream, at best. When pressed for a date, Garriott proves he's learned well from the lessons of Gabe Newell. "When *Tabula Rasa* is done!" [E2]



That's 'aspirational fantasy' then?



Better than Dunstable Town Hall...



★★★
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PC GAMES OF
2005
★★★



Not pleasant.



"Got anything to eat? I'm starved..."

DUNGEON & DRAGONS ONLINE

■ Pub: Atari | Dev: Turbine Games | www.ddo.com

Funny-shaped dice and dungeon master screens-a-go-go as Paul Presley visits Eberron

IF THE hardcore crowd of pen and paper role-players that makes up the world's Dungeons & Dragons fanbase need to be reassured of anything, it's that the people tasked with the mighty quest of bringing their precious world of hit points, saving throws, THAC0 stats and magic missiles to the MMO genre are as passionate about D&D as they are. They've no need to worry.

According to the regular developer diaries at the game's official website, the team at Turbine Games regularly take time out from busy coding and designing duties to pick up their character sheets, roll their dice and earn their XP. Lead designer, Ken Troop, knows that staying faithful to the source is vital if he wants to avoid alienating some of gaming's most rabid fans.

"We've known from day one that we're not doing a straight conversion of the PnP rules," he said when we spoke to him, "but our main goal is to capture the soul of Dungeons & Dragons. In a nutshell, we interpret this as getting together with a group of your friends and sharing thrilling, memorable adventures.

"Almost all MMORPGs derive their character systems from a Dungeons &



Bravely running away.

Dragons model, but only *D&D Online* is going to offer you the opportunity to create a character that plays and feels like your original D&D character. Why play an imitation when you can play the real thing?"

DO AS YOU PLEASE

Although news from the Turbine camp has been very quiet since the project was announced back in May 2003, work has been progressing nicely, to the point that internally the game has been running in a playable state for some time now. Staff apparently gather every Friday to go questing (mostly to test recent additions to the code, but no doubt to have a ball at the same time).



Combat is just one way of completing quests.

One of the most interesting-sounding aspects of the game is the old chestnut of experience, notably the way it's earned. Turbine has made it clear that XP is only gained through completion of quests, and that most dungeons are tightly scripted and instanced to you and your group only. Many quests contain non-combat objectives such as scouting or recovering artefacts. You can handle the monsters in these missions however you like – via combat, stealth,

diplomacy, or whatever. There are even quests which call for a total lack of killing whatsoever. All of which helps the online game retain the story-driven nature of the pen and paper version.

Along with *D&D*, Turbine is also busily developing *Middle-Earth Online* (see page 108). With two of the fantasy world's most genre-defining and influential sources of material at its disposal, the big-hitters of *EverQuest II* and *World Of Warcraft* might finally have some competition on their hands. **PC**



"So tell me sir, do you like your mouse inverted or not?"

GUILD WARS

■ Pub: NCSoft | Dev: ArenaNet | www.guildwars.com

Russ Fischer joins the Guild of Beta Fanboys to file this update

OF THE LARGE crop of MMO titles slated for 2005 release by the newly minted publishing powerhouse NCsoft, *Guild Wars* teases us most with its proximity to launch. Beta test weekends have just begun, and those road tests have been invaluable, says game director Jeff Strain. "*Guild Wars* is entering the final push of development. We continue to focus on adding content to the game in the form of missions, towns, explorable areas, items, armour, character faces and hair, and all of the gizmos, props, critters and people that make a world feel alive.

"We're also streamlining the user interface," he continues. "We're substantially enhancing the cooperative play experience and working to make missions more challenging, while also working on the early game experience to make it very easy for players to become familiar with the *Guild Wars* world and play mechanics. Finally, the balance team will be spending the next few months working to ensure that more than 450 unique skills are balanced and fun – and of course to ensure that no particular profession combination is superior to the others."

CONTROLLING FANS

Jeff uses a slight control tweak to demonstrate the ability to patch the game on-the-fly. "An example is how we handle the y-axis for mouse movement. Some people are used to flight simulation-style control in which pushing up on the mouse causes the camera to tilt down, and others prefer FPS-style control in which pushing up on the mouse tilts the camera up. Based on



"Bound for wild desire, I fell into a ring of fire..."

some forum posts within the first few hours of our World Preview Event, we added a feature to invert the mouse, and we streamed those files to players that very evening." That ability to stream content quickly to players has been one of the game's best selling-points, and the beta weekends have proved that the system works perfectly.

BETTER THAN A SLAP IN THE FACE

Fortunately, even with eye-catching features like the fee-free server model, Jeff and his team still have a few extra-special bits to reveal. "In subsequent events, we'll be showing a not-yet-seen feature we call 'Worlds at War'. This is the glue between the cooperative and competitive elements of the game. In



"Right, now where's that wimp Legolas now, huh?"



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"The ability to stream content quickly to players has been a major selling point, and the system works perfectly"

Guild Wars you can play with anyone in the world by visiting the international districts or global tournament, but you also create a 'home world' when you create your account that determines who you normally see in public areas. When a team from your world battles its way to the top of the international tournament and holds the 'Hall of Heroes', all players in your world will have access to bonus content such as quests, items, skills and pets. But these are only available while a team

from your world holds the top level."

The one game feature that's seen little development so far is the first planned expansion chapter. "The epic story that begins with the base game release next year will be continued through these chapters, and each one will also contain new professions, skills, items, monsters, quests and regions of the world to explore. Preliminary design work is under way, but we won't move fully into production until *Guild Wars* is in your hands." **PZ**

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 ★★★★★



The theory test was easy, but Mike's practical exam was tougher than expected.

AUTO ASSAULT

■ Pub: NCsoft | Dev: NetDevil | www.autoassault.com

ETA
TBA
2005

Russ Fischer hits the road, Mad Max-style, with NetDevil's Scott Brown

AT E3 2004, NetDevil's car combat booth was a wake-up call for those who view the MMO as a stodgy, swords-only affair. With an additional six months of development under its belt, project lead Scott Brown emphasises that a few changes have made *Auto Assault* faster and better.

"E3's demonstration was a limited example of core combat gameplay. Since then, we've been working on adding major graphic upgrades to the characters, cars, towns and environments, as well as polishing our hundreds of missions, arenas and crafting systems. We've also

torqued up the driving and smashing factor. On top of this we've added a completely new, dynamic loot generation system, which allows for countless variations of all types of loot. At this point, we're also enhancing all systems and adding as much content as possible."

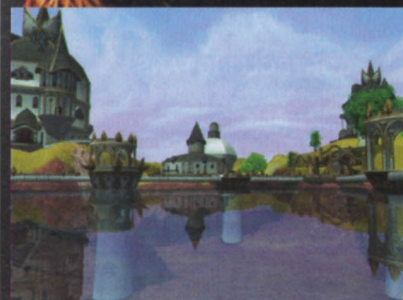
Changes aside, Brown says *Auto Assault* is still the visceral experience that hooked demo participants. "The pacing of the game is truly unlike any MMO experience. Critical features that have been improved since May include arena player-versus-player action, completely unprecedented

environmental destruction, and integrated voice chat."

Despite the prevalent action, 'character' is still valued in the new game. As Scott reinforces: "Because we have the two types of systems – real-time combat and hidden dice roll – layered on one another, it provides us with the advantages of action-based combat, while giving a real value to character growth. The system has shaped up to pretty much play the way we want it to; the only changes we'll see moving forward from now on will be tweaks based on any beta testing feedback we get."



Remember, it's mirror, signal, manoeuvre, rocket launcher, bonus kills.



Crikey! Have the elves left already?

CITY OF VILLAINS

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2005

■ Pub: NCsoft | Dev: Cryptic Studios | www.cityofvillains.com

Good is dumb, thinks Russ Fischer as he cracks the Cryptic Studios lair

SINCE WE first donned masks in *City Of Heroes*, the burning question has been, 'where are the bad guys?' Thanks to a team led by designer Jack Emmert, that day draws nigh. "We've designed the core gameplay systems and have done a basic pass on the new zones and groups," says Jack. "We've fully detailed a few of the early zones and the artists are just about to kick off work on those."

We're assuming that *City Of Villains* will feature familiar archetypes (only with an evil bent), but Jack suggests otherwise: "Initially, I envisioned that COV would have the same archetypes, but I was persuaded to try something a little different." In addition, players will explore more detailed and functionally

'living' zones that mirror recent expansion efforts in the original game.

At the time of writing, *City Of Villains* has yet to hit beta, and Jack describes a few key notes he'd like to see addressed. "First, is the game fun? Most things are secondary to fun. If a game's a drag to play, it doesn't matter how innovative you're trying to be. Second, balance. Since the core is PvP, players need to feel like they can measure up, regardless of their archetypes or powers. Third, does the player feel like a villain? Our goal isn't to recreate *COH* with new art, but rather to present a new experience for the new and existing player. I don't want the missions to feel like missions – I want them to feel like crimes."



Paragon City – ripe for the plucking.



Peaceful and serene, wait till the Dark Riders show up.



MEO should remain faithful to the book.



MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE

Balrogs, orcs, wargs, market forces – Paul Presley wonders if anything can stop Frodo in his tracks?

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Turbine Games | www.middle-earthonline.com

FIRST A confirmation of a delay, then rumour of cancellation. You'd be forgiven for thinking that not all was well in the Shire's expectant online gaming community. As it turned out, the cancellation rumour was just that, a mistaken leap to conclusions based around a retail outlet's cancellation of its pre-orders. The delay, however, was less welcome for its accuracy. According to Turbine Games, previously responsible for running the *Asheron's Call* series and also the team working on the *Dungeons & Dragons Online* MMOG (see p104), the multiplayer adventures of Tolkien's creations has been held back in order to review the various systems and mechanics and to work on how to make all the elements fuse into a single

coherent experience worthy of the source material (in this case, the books, not the films).

One such mechanic comes hot on the heels of the recent appointment to the game's production team of Mike Wallis, previously part of the team behind *EVE Online*. Much as in *EVE*, *MEO* will see player skills advancing on a time-based system, rather than through repetitive use or levelling. Basically you can log in, select a skill to begin improving, log out and come back hours or days later once it's finished. Another nod to Wallis' *EVE* background comes through the reassurance that the character generation system will contain enough options to allow everyone to have a unique look.

Quite what role you'll play in the game and how the over-arching story will affect players are presumably part of what led to the delay. What is known is that the setting takes place around the time the Fellowship exits the mines of Moria (first book, two-thirds of the way through), so that's prior to the big old battles with the elephants and Legolas being all cool and that (second and third film, near the end in both of 'em). Which hopefully means there'll be a palpable sense of doom and foreboding over everything to keep players on their toes.

Actually, atmosphere is a key element for the design team, with immersion being one of the guiding principles. Particularly in terms of sound, music and lighting, and the promise is that all the

presentation elements will be fully utilised to conjure up everything from being in the middle of a bustling town to slogging through a creepy dungeon.

How the players will fit themselves into all these immersive atmospherics without breaking the mood by talking in I33t speak and so on is another issue that has yet to be resolved. But player actions are alleged to have a direct affect on the world, including an ethical or moral dimension. Again, details are sketchy, but the notions of good and evil (as well as how the players themselves interpret them) play a direct role on character development and how the world feels about you. Which is a scary thought when you think about it.

ETA
Late
2005

FIGHT CLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Last month saw our glorious (ahem) return to the world of *Counter-Strike*, this time on the Source engine. The ZONE ranks were packed to bursting, with Dave, Jamie, Prezzer, Will, Korda, Filby, Kieldsen and several of the admins all taking part – along with a very special guest for the first few rounds. Yes, creator of cult webtoon *Weeb! And Bob* joined us for a few blasts of the old shotgun and a great time was had by all.

Being *Counter-Strike* there were simply far too many players of merit to mention in a single page, but a special shout-out goes to the Sector7G clan for showing us how the game should be played.

We're still running our Reader's Choice poll on the www.pczone.co.uk forums, where C-S: *Source* is again leading the popular vote. However, there's still time to make your voice heard if you want to push another game

ahead instead ("cough" *Joint Ops* "cough"). Not that we're biased or anything.

No Fight Club next issue as we're taking a break for New Year's, but we'll be back the issue after

stronger than ever. Of course, just because we're not around doesn't mean you can't still find a decent game or two.

Head to www.zonegames.co.uk to keep abreast of the games currently running on our public servers and to find all the relevant connection details. We're constantly changing the games being played – the most recent addition being a *Half Life*

2 Deathmatch server (for good or ill) and

we're hoping to have a *Tribes: Vengeance* server up any day now. Meanwhile, you can always challenge others to a game not listed by logging on to our forums and posting a message to the eager regulars or heading into #pcz on Quakenet IRC (see opposite page) and saying hello. See you on the battlefield.

COME & HAVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info



Our rusty *Counter-Strike* skills were exposed all too quickly. We used to be good at this, honest!

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY JANUARY 27

6.30pm – 9pm

Counter-Strike: Source (subject to change)

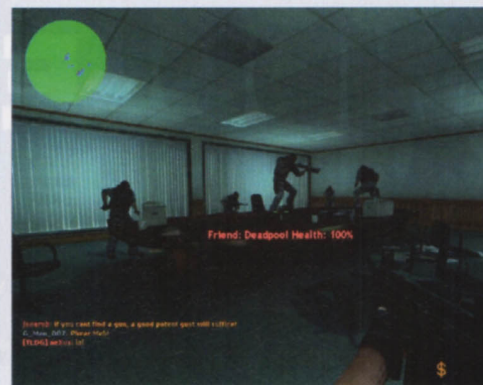
THURSDAY FEBRUARY 24

6.30pm – 9pm

Joint Operations: Escalation

WHO'S WHO

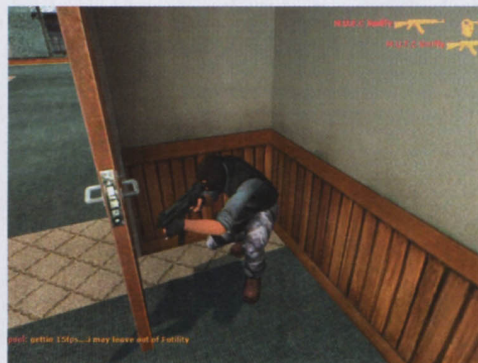
| | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| Dave Woods | Kid Unknown |
| Jamie Sefton | Northern Scum |
| Paul Presley | Prezzer |
| Will Porter | Batsphinx |
| Suzy Wallace | Uzibat |
| Jamie Malcolm | Jimlad |
| Anthony Holden | Shokupan |
| Martin Korda | Nameless One |
| Jamie Sefton | NorthernScum |
| Phil Wand | People's Front Of Judea |
| Michael Filby | Parallax |
| Sam Kieldsen | BoyWonda |
| Stu Bishop | Banzai |
| Andrew Taylor | Druski |



Another fractious PCZ board meeting gets under way.



How PCZ spent most of the evening.



Some things never change...



ZONECHAT

CAN YOU HEAR US AT THE BACK, MOTHER?



IT WAS audio/visual night in our last Zone Chat before the Christmas break. Well textual/visual at least. Prezzer had his digital camera in the office and much fun was had snapping shots of the team hard at work (or playing on their shiny new Nintendo DS consoles anyway) and uploading them for the inhabitants of #pcz to marvel at. Our thanks go out to Jonarob for hosting the pics for us.

One particularly grumpy shot of Jamie Sefton provided the impetus for the night's competition, with the scribe of the funniest caption winning a signed copy of *Tribes: Vengeance*. Well done to AkasaReeve for his entry: "In protest of PCZ's move to Future Publishing, Sefton decided to look *even more* dour than usual." Hmm, well it seemed a lot funnier at the time...

Plenty of ZONE presence too, with Prezzer and Will being joined online by Suzy, Rhianna, Filby and Sam Kiildsen. Topics raised included *Half-Life 2* deathmatch, rubbish game shows on TV, ZONE's favourite alcoholic beverage of 'Wheatos' and what they do to the team, and a prolonged chat about cars and chavs with Suzy. Eeriest

moment of the night came with Fnua's admission that she finds Steve Hill, ahem, 'sexy'. Takes all sorts.

No Zone Chat next issue due to the New Year break, but we'll be back online Wednesday, January 26 and a full report will follow in issue 153. That said, you can still join in with the regulars in #pcz and chat about all things ZONE and game-related, just by pointing your IRC software at a Quakenet server and typing /join #pcz. It's like one big happy family, isn't it?

**WEDNESDAY
JANUARY 26
5PM - 7PM**

LAN ROVER

Steve Randall spent so much time at New Year's parties, he almost missed his dead-LAN... (It's been a long year, OK?)

■ www.blasthards.co.uk is holding its next event from February 4-6 at The Lord Nelson, in Thirsk, North Yorkshire. The cost for the whole event is £15, which includes free matchsticks (to hold your eyes open, of course).

■ www.flintfrag.co.uk is now hosting an event every other month starting in January. Each event will be on the second Sunday of the month (March, May, July, September and November) with a regular cost of £10 a session at the Holiday Inn on Westbound A55, North Wales. The host's car alone is worth the visit.

■ www.lansupnorth.co.uk got in with plenty of notice of its next event in Hull, known simply as "11". It runs from January 14-16 and has 20 places at £20 a head.

■ Thanks also to Loki for notifying me of the first event of the year for www.adrenelan.org.uk. Held

at Rixton and Glazebrook Village Hall (between Manchester and Warrington), it's a 30-hour event from 10am on Saturday, January 29 until 4pm on Sunday, January 30. It will set you back £30.

■ Since I left www.hgfan.co.uk the mantle has been passed to Norphy who hosts the next event with Unlucky on February 4-6 at Queen Mary University, Mile End Campus. It costs £20 in advance or £30 at the door. Expect plenty of competitions with prizes.

■ Slapped wrists for the organisers of www.tripwyre.co.uk whose website is still showing their next event as August 2003! Get it together chaps.

■ If you want your party to feature here drop me a line, with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@ggfan.co.uk. Scalper out.

GUILDHALL



▲ START THE NEW YEAR WITH A NEW CLAN

There are dozens of like-minded souls out there, from professional money-making clans to groups of fans who just like a laugh. If you're looking to form a gang of your own, then just send your details to the address below.

CLAN [DfG] Death for Granted

CONTACT hawk@DfG-Clan.co.uk

WEBSITE www.DfG-Clan.co.uk

MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*

DETAILS We are a friendly international clan looking for some skilled players to participate in our clan wars and daily events. We have 56k and broadband squads to keep clan wars, etc, fair. Just contact one of our senior members to join, and come enjoy some COD with the best.

CLAN CTO - Counter Terror Organisation

CONTACT CTOChris1337@yahoo.com

WEBSITE www.clan-cto.com

MAIN GAME *Counter-Strike* series, *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, *Star Wars Battlefront*

DETAILS CTO has been going for nearly a year now and we have about 100 members. We have our own servers for *Wolfenstein* and *Counter-Strike* - the IP addresses for both are: C-S 68.14.93.181:27015, ET 66.55.148.118:27960. If you register at CTO remember to stay active and recruit people for the clan.

CLAN 22 SAS

CONTACT jon_coops@hotmail.com (or email22ndsas@aol.com - subject: SAS)

WEBSITE sascod.topcities.com

MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty: United Offensive*

DETAILS We are a large clan with a 15-plus age limit. We have two servers, one for Clanbase and one for fun. We use Gamespy and Teamspeak 2 so both are required along with a mic. We're looking for mature players and we don't mind if you can't hit a barn door at three yards - it's just for fun.

CLAN .-=[TDK]=- Total Death Killers

CONTACT waggiebm@clantdk.com

WEBSITE www.clantdk.com

MAIN GAMES *Unreal Tournament*

DETAILS .-=[TDK]=- is a UT ZeroPing Sniper clan. We are friendly and have skilled players. We've just joined the CTF 5v5 PIPGN ladder. We have our own Teamspeak server and three gaming servers, including a 32-man one. Come and sign up to our forum.

CLAN GOR LAN Gamers

CONTACT wobbly@gorlangamers.co.uk

WEBSITE www.gorlangamers.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Condition Zero*, *Counter-Strike Source*, *Desert Combat Final*

DETAILS We are a mature, established clan and we're looking for new members. We've been around for over three years now and run our own 30-plus player LAN Parties every three months. We have three public servers running and a Ventrilo voice comms server. Interested? Then pay us a visit.

CLAN .-[BBK]= British Born Killers

CONTACT scruples@space2k1.fsnet.co.uk

WEBSITE www.britishbornkillers.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Call Of Duty* (plus *United Offensive*)

DETAILS We are a COD: UO clan that plays Capture The Flag and Search & Destroy. We are a mature, friendly clan who are currently RECRUITING new players aged 18-plus. We have our own COD: UO server and a Teamspeak one. Our server is always open to public members. See you on the battlefield!

To feature in Guildhall simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC ZONE, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE

WIN
BIG
PRIZES!!

Step up to the plate and play to win...

ROUND THREE of the PC ZONE Readers' Challenge has been concluded, and what a round it was! Ups, downs, middle bits – the lot. A last-minute technical hitch meant that the proposed *Day Of Defeat* event had to be replaced with *Painkiller* 1v1 Deathmatch instead. Not that it put anyone off, and after a hectic series of playoffs, quarter and semi-finals, the initial 32-player line-up came down to a face-off between Sander 'Vo0' Kaasjager and Alexander 'Ztrider' Ingrav on DM_Psycho. Vo0 took the honours after a hard-fought battle, beating Ztrider, 29-10.

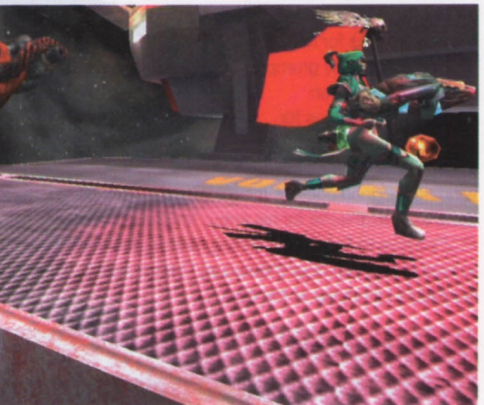
Meanwhile, the other events saw the *Doom 3* 2v2 event being won by Fredrik 'gopher' Quick and Karl-Erik 'tybalt' Danielsson of clan fnatic, and the *Counter-Strike: Source* trophy being lifted by the guys from Clan Rush!. Well done to them and big thanks to everyone who entered.

As mentioned last issue, round four is just being completed now, and we'll bring you the results of the *Tribes: Vengeance* 10v10, *Joint Operations: Escalation* Team King Of The Hill 8v8 and *Quake III* 5v5 CTF matches next issue.

Meanwhile, prepare yourself – round five should just be opening for business as you read this. Get on over to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk and sign yourself up another round of 1v1 *Painkiller* deathmatches, or your team for either 6v6 *Day Of Defeat* or 4v4 *Half-Life 2* Team Deathmatch (get practising with those gravity guns).

Each month, you have the chance to win top prizes from our fabulous sponsors (see below) simply by entering the PCZRC. All you have to do is log on to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk, see which game challenge takes your fancy and sign you or your team up. Of course, you do then have to win your matches, but that shouldn't be a problem, right? You are the best of the best after all. Of course you are!

SIGN UP AT
www.pczone.jolt.co.uk
TODAY!



20-player *Tribes: Vengeance* matches should sort the men from the boys.

Quake III Capture The Flag for teams of five.

READERS' CHALLENGE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES

ASUS
HEART OF TECHNOLOGY

The V9950 series from leading graphics card manufacturer Asus takes GeForce FX performance to a whole new level. www.asus.com

CORSAIR

The XMS product line is Corsair's premium desktop product family and the world's most highly awarded memory. www.corsairmemory.com

CREATIVE
WWW.EUROPE.CREATIVE.COM

Creative's Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS soundcards and the Inspire T7700 speakers produce superior audio for gamers. www.creative.com

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Logitech raises the bar in gaming precision and performance with the MX 510 mouse and Internet Navigator SE Keyboard. www.logitech.co.uk

MSI
MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL

A worldwide leader in the motherboard industry, MSI's K7N2 supports the latest AthlonXP and Duron processors. www.msicomputer.co.uk

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Plantronics USB headset with DSP (digital signal processing) and maximum bass response – enhanced for gaming. www.plantronics.com

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The WD Raptor is a new class of hard drive that matches SCSI reliability and performance. www.westerndigital.com

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online gaming

The home of Online Gaming, Jolt provides services from basic Quake clan ports to managed corporate game server solutions. www.jolt.co.uk

RESULTS

DOOM 3 - DEATHMATCH 2v2

QUARTER-FINALS

| | | |
|---------------------|-------|---------------------|
| REZAH & MADDOG | 34-25 | ASH & PROTOSS |
| CANNA & DRDOOM | 23-28 | DK & DRAGON |
| BATTOSAI & INSTINCT | 16-45 | EZZ & TRONIC |
| GOPHER & TYBALT | 55-9 | SABOTAJ & ATOMICJAM |

SEMI-FINALS

| | | |
|----------------|-------|-----------------|
| REZAH & MADDOG | 23-31 | DK & DRAGON |
| EZZ & TRONIC | 16-27 | GOPHER & TYBALT |

FINAL

| | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------------|
| GOPHER & TYBALT | 65-17 | DK & DRAGON |
|-----------------|-------|-------------|

WINNERS: FREDRIK 'GOPHER' QUICK & KARL-ERIK 'TYBALT' DANIELSSON

PAINKILLER - DEATHMATCH 1v1

QUARTER-FINALS

| | | |
|---------|------|---------|
| VOO | 48-7 | CLAINS |
| KUULA | 7-23 | DUFFYD |
| ZTRIDER | 38-7 | JABB0R |
| DUNTON | 9-26 | SHADISH |

SEMI-FINALS

| | | |
|---------|------|---------|
| VOO | 36-5 | DUFFYD |
| ZTRIDER | 20-0 | SHADISH |

FINAL

| | | |
|-----|-------|---------|
| VOO | 29-10 | ZTRIDER |
|-----|-------|---------|

WINNER: SANDER 'VOO' KAASJAGER

COUNTER-STRIKE:SOURCE 5v5

QUARTER-FINALS

| | | |
|------------|-------|---------------|
| PLAYED! | 13-10 | TOMATO SOURCE |
| DH | 2-13 | TEAM DIGNITAS |
| CLAN RUSH! | 13-6 | TRADEMARK |
| #PDI | 1-0 | B00NZ |

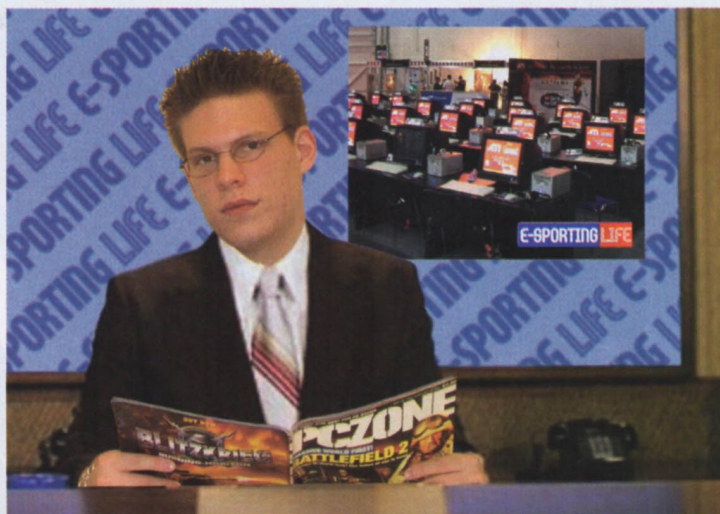
SEMI-FINALS

| | | |
|------------|------|---------------|
| PLAYED! | 4-13 | TEAM DIGNITAS |
| CLAN RUSH! | 13-0 | #PDI |

FINAL

| | | |
|---------------|------|------------|
| TEAM DIGNITAS | 6-13 | CLAN RUSH! |
|---------------|------|------------|

WINNERS: CLAN RUSH!



E-SPORTING LIFE

All the latest news from the wide, wide world of professional gaming. Your man at the E-Sports desk - Philip Wride

The CPL UK Qualifiers are over, along with the BloodLine LAN - and what an event it was. Teams from across Europe descended on London to participate in the event, hosted by GameFrontier, which was offering an all-expenses paid trip to Dallas, Texas for the CPL Winter event. Much like the CPL Summer qualifiers, the grand final came down to another grudge match between French outfit GoodGame and British powerhouse 4Kings Intel. This bitter rivalry has existed since the summer when GoodGame overcame 4Kings - but this time the tables were reversed. The scoreline was impressive and 4Kings showed they'd been working hard and came out on top.


The other main part of the event was the BloodLine Painkiller tournament, which was hosted as a *Pop Idol*-style competition to find several Painkiller players for the 4Kings Intel

squad. As part of the squad, the winner would get to participate in the CPL World Tour in 2005, with \$1 million on offer in prize money. After a few teething and tournament structure problems, games got played and players became more and more hopeful of winning the places in 4Kings. In the end, four players won the right to represent 4Kings and picked up their contracts in a hyped-up presentation at the end of the event. These four will now work hard to prepare for 2005, and two of them will be flying to the CPL Winter event with the successful 4Kings Counter-Strike team, to take part in the Painkiller competition. This is also the first qualifier for the World Tour. It should be interesting to see how both teams fare at the event and find out whether they have what it takes to make it with the best.

The final part of the event was a BYOC LAN party hosted by Jolt, with some tasty prizes on offer. In the end, Calibre walked away £2,000 richer and with enough components to build a new PC courtesy of Intel in the Counter-Strike tournament. TAG ruled in the Call Of Duty contest and pocketed £1,000. There were also cash prizes on offer for the Quake 3 and UT2K4 tournaments, with £400 for first place in each.

Overall, it was a good event that was enjoyed by all and proved to be successful for 4Kings Intel. Stay tuned for the movie that will be based around the story of the Painkiller competition. Thanks to GameFrontier for the CPL and Painkiller LAN tournaments, and to Jolt for the BYOC and Online qualifiers for Painkiller.





THIS TIME IT'S WAR.

MEDAL OF HONOR: DOGS OF WAR

ONLY IN PSW!



ONLY PSW GIVES YOU ALL THIS!

- Free DVD! Over 30 new game demos!
- Free tips book! Six complete guides!
- Best-selling independent PS2 mag!

PSW
ON SALE NOW!



"Let's go kill some Imperials! Or rebels - what's the difference...?"



"That's no moon! Oh wait, yes it is. My bad."



STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED

£19.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Sony Online Entertainment/LucasArts |
ETA: Out Now | www.starwarsgalaxies.com

REQUIRES PIII 933, 256MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card, an Internet connection, a copy of *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided*
DESIRES P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Never mind the Kessel Run, Paul Presley has a hard enough job getting to work on time

HERE IS a perfect example of why *Star Wars Galaxies* has failed to become the best MMO ever made. *Jump To Lightspeed* is the expansion that we were supposedly all waiting for, finally adding the much-missed space combat element to a *Star Wars* universe that has so far been surprisingly lacking in thrills.

Anyway, having opted to train up with the Rebel faction and worked my way up to piloting a

Y-Wing above the skies of Tatooine, I found myself being invited to team up with a fellow pilot. Except he was following the Imperial route and flying a TIE Fighter. Undeterred, we grouped together and headed off to find some easy kills. And so there we were, Imperial and Rebel pilot flying side by side, blowing up wandering pirates, Rebel transports and Imperial patrols together with nary a care in the world. Not exactly true to the source material.

But that's been the problem with *SWG* since day one. On paper the idea of a massively multiplayer RPG set in the world of Han Solo, Boba Fett, Darth Vader, X-Wings and Jedi would be the best thing ever. Unfortunately the game has never lived up to this promise - it's been a flawed experiment from the get-go.

As a generic sci-fi MMOG, there's nothing wrong with it. But because it's tied to a franchise that just about everyone in the

(such as my experience above), it just looks hopelessly flawed.

Jump To Lightspeed was supposed to go some way towards rectifying this problem (rumour has even suggested it's Sony's last chance to get the game right before LucasArts steps in and takes it away for major rebuilding), and while there's an undeniable thrill the first time a TIE Fighter screams past your cockpit making all the right noises, it soon becomes apparent that it's little more than the ground game all over again but with a twitch game mechanic bolted onto the front.

droids and so on all try hard to convince us that this is the *Star Wars* we know and love. But it all feels incredibly forced (no pun intended).

Bottom line is that *Jump To Lightspeed* is not an essential addition to *SWG*, and by no means repairs the many faults of the existing game. But it's certainly not a bad expansion if you're already committed to the world and are looking for a little more variety. What it isn't is *X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter Online*. More's the pity. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

EVE ONLINE

Reviewed Issue 130, Score: 88%

The other space MMOG. Much slower and more strategic in nature, this is nonetheless a fully realised universe with much to recommend.

PLANETSIDE

Reviewed Issue 131, Score: 82%

Similar in that it's a MMOG and it's twitch-based. Many have said that if this had been the model for *SWG* in the first place things would have been so much better.

"It isn't X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter Online. More's the pity"



Always wanted one of these.

world (by my last count) is intimately familiar with - and one that's already been exhaustively archived by a legion of fans - the smallest error stands out like a Wookiee in a cantina. And when the game mechanics force it to make compromises that simply don't fit with the source material

WHERE IT COUNTS

Annoyingly this isn't actually that bad a thing. Structurally it's sound, and it ties into the existing ground game perfectly well, introducing four new career paths, adding two new species and providing an effort-to-reward ratio that's actually a little higher than you get on the ground. But it ISN'T *Star Wars* and therein lies the problem.

It certainly does its best to maintain the illusion. Being able to wander around inside ships (like the Millennium Falcon variant - the YT-1300), man turrets, customise ships, utilise

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fly X-Wings, TIE Fighters and the Millennium Falcon
- ✓ Meshes with the ground game perfectly
- ✓ Twitch gameplay merges with RPG skills without fault
- ✓ New races
- ✗ Still doesn't convince us it's *Star Wars*
- ✗ Not essential

71

The Force is middling in this one



Better than a spokie-dokie any day of the week.



Evil Knievel undercover.



Tanks are all powerful.



Snipers no longer rule the roost.

JOINT OPERATIONS: ESCALATION

■ £19.99 | Pub: NovaLogic | Dev: NovaLogic | ETA: Out Now |

www.novalogic.com

REQUIRES PIII 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card and an Internet connection

DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Anthony Holden has fun with tanks and bikes, but where are the bloody escalators?

FOR THE first half hour of playing *Joint Ops: Escalation*, I absolutely despised it. You see, until this expansion came along, I was one of the people you probably hate: a craven,

opportunistic sniper taking potshots from behind a tree half a kilometre away from the real action. I know it was a callow, lily-livered way to behave, but I just couldn't help myself – the game positively encouraged it.

Escalation has put an end to all that, crippling the role of snipers and forcing my kind to play the game properly. And you know what? It feels great.

GOODBYE ZOOM

If you're yet to taste the pleasures of *Joint Ops*, it's

essentially a larger-scale, more realistic and

modern-day variant of *Battlefield*. Up until now, it's been a sniper's paradise, but even I'm willing to admit this was a major flaw. *Escalation* not only makes snipers easier to spot, it removes the adjustable zoom from scoped rifles and adds a disorienting 'drift' when you go into scope view. The result is that sniping is now no fun at all, and very few players are going to use it as their default class.

However, this is a mere aside compared to some of the other changes – *Escalation* alters *Joint Ops* so radically, it's almost a new game. For a start, there are

now great big tanks – M1A1 Abrams and T-80s. With firepower greater than anything seen in *Joint Ops* before, these buggers don't just add options, they shift the game into full-blown warfare.

More significant still are the dirt bikes. Agile and arcade to control, these zippy two-wheelers are superb, speeding up the action and cutting down transit time immensely. You can even have a buddy riding pillion with no loss of mobility, making drive-by shootings commonplace.

Two-man attack helicopters are also in the piece, along with



The new vehicles take some getting used to.

a parachute accessory for emergency bailouts (or coordinated para-drops). Nifty Javelin missiles and anti-tank mines help balance the tanks, while a clutch of new guns and body armour round out the deal.

HELLO ACTION

The result of all these changes is profound. The game feels far more complete – better balanced, more tactical and with greater emphasis on teamwork. What's more, the new vehicles completely change the way the game's played. The speed of the dirt bikes means lightning raids can happen at any moment, necessitating vigilant base-guarding. Tanks can dominate a map in minutes if not adequately defended against. Even the terrain has altered, shifting away from the swampy, waterlogged style in *Joint Ops* in favour of a drier and more open feel.

Unfortunately, there's still only one decent game type – Advance And Secure – while the

communication and squad options remain inadequate. And while being able to select three different types of ammo is nice, it seems too hardcore to me by far.

On balance however, the changes and additions here are excellent. On current form, I'd rather play this than any *Battlefield* game, and with sniping ruined, that's definitely saying something. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Reviewed Issue 141, Score: 87%

Fast, fun and frivolous, the *Battlefield* games are candyfloss to *Escalation*'s peanut brittle. Both are good, it's just a matter of temperament.

PLANETSIDE

Reviewed Issue 131, Score: 82%

Fun for a month and a miserable grind thereafter, *PlanetSide*'s persistent-world battles are a poor shadow of *Joint Ops: Escalation*.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Radically alters the game
- ✓ Brilliant dirt bikes
- ✓ Over 25 new maps, some of them stunning
- ✓ Snipers seriously reigned in
- ✓ Still only one decent play-mode
- ✗ Team communication not facilitated enough

85

A whole new game

GALACTIC CONQUEST V4.2

SIZE 657MB REQUIRES Full version of Battlefield 1942

www.galactic-conquest.net

Die rebel scum, says **Tony Lamb**

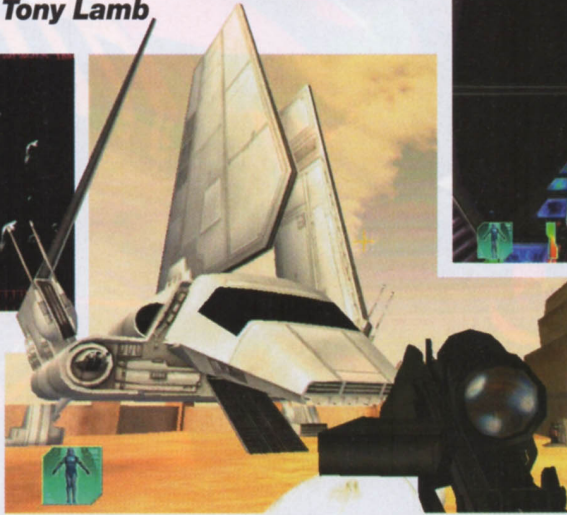
TOTAL CONVERSION



So much for the medics.

FEW things are as alarming in a game as the sight and sound of Phil Wand in full panic mode, sprinting around a corner towards you in a cloud of expletives. This was, however, what confronted me barely a minute after starting up this

mod. Seconds later, the reason for Wendy's terror



So what is that top fin for anyway?

became apparent as an imperial AT-ST followed him in hot pursuit and opened fire. Bandy-legged ostriches they might be, but up close – 50ft tall and pissed-off – they're bloody scary.

So too, in fact, is the level of improvement since this mod last graced these pages. Barely a year ago, *Galactic Conquest* was a one-map knockabout with a few TIE Fighters, snowspeeders



"I have you now!"

and AT-STs – not any more. Now, GC is a *Star Wars* extravaganza, with many new maps, more vehicles (most of which are usable and neatly animated), film-accurate sound effects and more fun than some official *Star Wars* games...

Taking its class structure and basic gameplay from *BF1942*, *Galactic Conquest* is a total conversion with style. It needs a little polish – some animations are a bit weak and map quality varies from 'outstanding' to 'why bother?' – but overall, it's a very



An ostrich, yesterday.



Also good as a doorstop.

enjoyable mod that only needs a bigger fanbase to really take off. If you're a *Star Wars* fans, you'll drool like a puppy dog when you play it – and even the more level-headed should love it too.

PCZONE
VERDICT

85

A new hope

ACTION BATTLEFIELD V1.152



SIZE 288MB REQUIRES Full version of Battlefield 1942

www.planetbattlefield.com/actionbf

TOTAL CONVERSION

Sometimes, **Tony Lamb** fancies a real taste of the action



A is for aircraft. Or action.



Congestion charging was having little effect.



And you thought car-jacking was a recent problem...



Now that's worth fighting a war for.

ADDING 'Action' to the names of the biggest FPS games of the last few years has become synonymous with the maddest, baddest and most irreverent versions around. It's become a must-have, like the various *Team Fortress* or *Counter-Strike*-alikes that have sprung up too. Mention *Action Half-Life* or *Action Quake* to any grizzled old deathmatch gamer and watch his eyes mist up.

This mod is all about fun, not whether soldier Smith is wearing the correct shoulder patches. Guns are bigger. Explosions are

bigger. Engineers can build bunkers and AA positions. Medics drop healthpacks that don't disappear. There's a jetpack, a flamethrower and more. Realism mods have their place, but sometimes we need something different. Something that says 'hang the historical accuracy, just give us carnage'.

Action BF carries on the tradition of tweaking the gameplay in original and enjoyment-creating ways, giving *Battlefield* a welcome shot in the arm. New and updated weapons give better fragging opportunities,

more flexible and durable vehicles carry better armament and amended spawn points make more vehicles available. There's nothing radical, but the changes work well together.

Single-player bloodletting isn't an option, sadly, but online is fun, despite the limited server supply. Plus, LAN play is great if you can get enough players to make the big maps worthwhile.

PCZONE
VERDICT

72

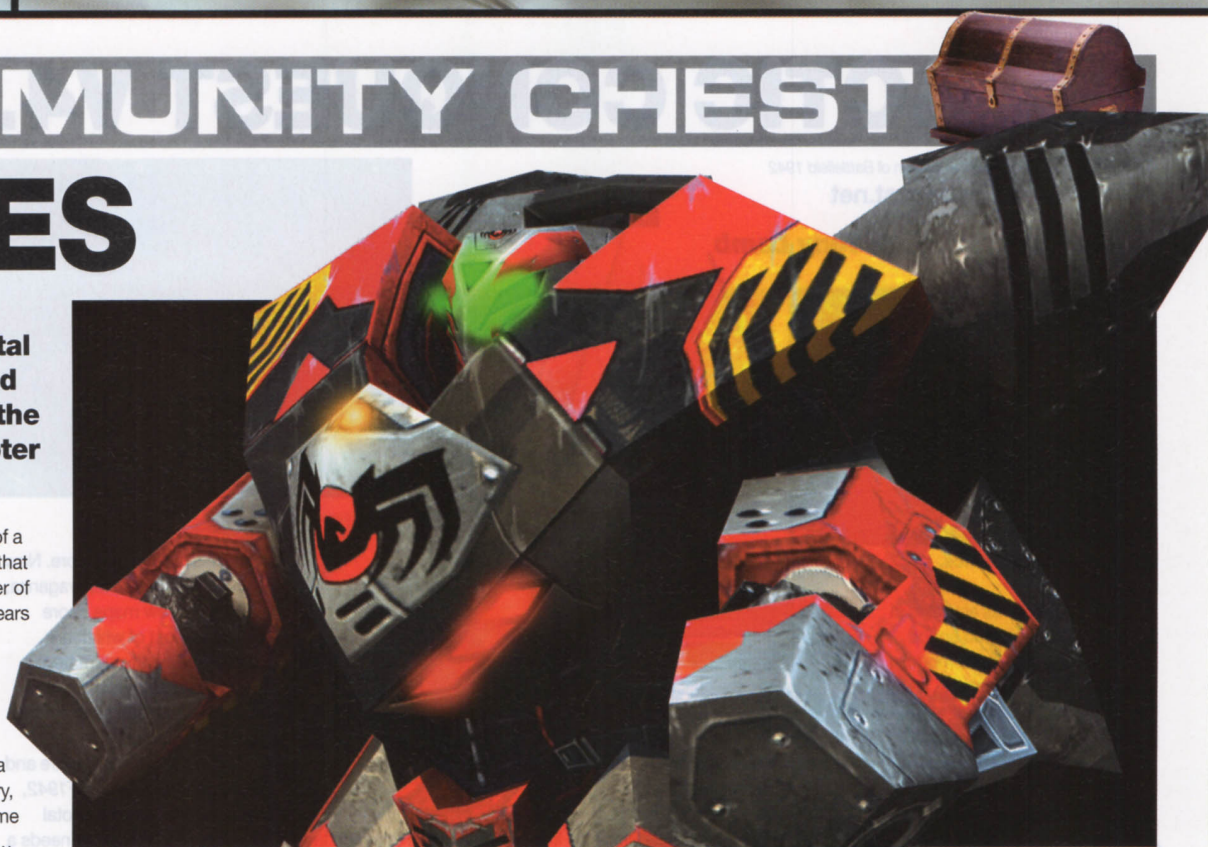
Battlefield on steroids

COMMUNITY CHEST

TRIBES

Daniel Emery checks out the best mods, total conversions, skins and add-ons for arguably the best team-based shooter series of all time...

Although *Tribes* became something of a cult in the US, it wasn't until *Tribes 2* that we started to see a significant number of British players enter the fray. Three years on, you might find your gameplay getting a tad stale. In fairness to VU Games, it's released two excellent chapters to the series (*Vengeance* and *Aerial Assault*). However, you don't have to shell out, as we've got a festive hamper of virtual goodies to try, with enough add-ons to keep the game fresh for a long while. And it's all free...



ANNIHILATION MOD (TRIBES 1)

www.annihilation.info

This server-side mod (removing the hassle of client-side downloads) has eight armour classes, four vehicles, 29 weapons (including the new particle beams, mini-bombers and Vulcan class) and loads more. While not a true TC – the maps and uniforms are still vintage *Tribes 1* – there's enough new stuff to make it feel like a new game.



TRIBES2MAPS (TRIBES 2)

www.tribes2maps.com

As you've probably guessed from the name, this is the ultimate *Tribes 2* map vault. There are over 2,000 different levels to download and play, from Capture the Flag through to Defend and Destroy. The only downside seems to be that the site hasn't been updated for a while, but it's still well worth a look though.



TRIBAL WAR (TRIBES 1&2)

www.tribalwar.com

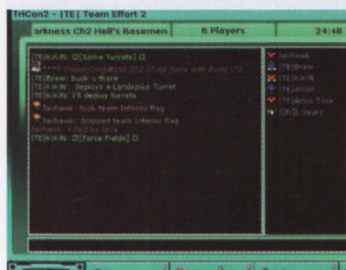
There aren't many dedicated game fansites that have run non-stop since the start and still remained massively popular, but Tribal War is one of them. It's been designed as a one-stop-shop for anything and everything *Tribes*-related, although its raison d'être is for players to organise league, tournament and clan matches.



PLANET TRIBES (TRIBES 1 & 2)

www.planettribes.com

The Community Chest page just wouldn't be complete without a hit on the 'Planet' series. As always, the site's packed with levels, maps, skins and mods. But unlike other Planet sites, this one's only got the top 50. This can be a tad limiting, but it also saves you the hassle of sifting through all the trash.



TRICON 2 (TRIBES 2)

tricon.rosenberry.net

Unless you're au fait with running game servers, the next sentence may sound like gibberish: TriCon2 enables you to add and remove .cs scripts and automatically updates its menus. It's designed to be intuitive and allow sysops to determine the level of control their admins have on their server. Well, we did warn you...



MECHINA (TRIBES 2)

www.mechina.com

There's little doubt that the guys behind Mechina were big fans of the *Mechwarrior* series. This mod attempts to bring a little of that Mecha universe to *Tribes 2*. Ranging from light assault to heavy siege platforms built to seemingly last indefinitely in battle, there's enough firepower here to raze Fallujah to the ground in seconds...



TRIBES 2 MODS (TRIBES 2)

www.tribes2mods.com

This is the sister site to Tribes2Maps – except it deals only in mod, the whole mod and nothing but the mod, so help me mod (*Fired – Ed*). There's not really much more we can say, other than you'll find every mod that's ever been made for *Tribes 2* on this site. Which is no mean feat when you think about it.



MAGEMOD (TRIBES 2)

www.geocities.com/orderofthemagi2

Given that *Tribes 2* is set in a futuristic universe, it's no surprise that someone wanted to give it that retro-fantasy RPG feel – enter MageMod. Weapons are replaced by spells, players have an RPG-esque inventory system and there are loads of mythical items to collect.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill comes full circle in the terrifying world of *EverQuest II*



"Never mind that - where are the centipedes?"

AS IT WAS in the beginning, so it shall be in the end. Many moons ago, I was a lowly troll, scavenging a living by killing rats in the dank dungeons of the original *EverQuest*. Not any more. I've got people who do that sort of thing for me now. By people, I of course mean Prezzar, who in traditional fashion has been fluffing my *EverQuest II* character into the rampant beast that stands before you. Mctaggish is the name, a Level 6 Barbarian Fighter, no less.

By the time I step into the leather boots of Mctaggish, I'm packing some decent armoury, and better still, I appear to be in

a pub. Can I get a pint? Can I bollocks. Storming out in a barbaric huff, I decide to cool down by taking a stroll by the sea. Unfortunately, I've yet to get my bearings and manage to walk straight off the end of the pier and into the inky blackness of the ocean. Thrashing about very much in the manner of a drowning man, I fail to grasp the basics of swimming, and within seconds I'm dead.

WATERY GRAVE

Not the best of starts, but some hope is offered when I receive a message informing me that I can wait there until a passing Samaritan revives me. Considering that I'm face down at the bottom of the sea, this

seems unlikely, and after a few minutes of quiet contemplation, I decide to take the forfeit and revive myself.

Back on dry land, I somehow get talking to a twitchy woman called Jodi, who apparently has to pick up some potions but can't because she's got to queue for her giro or something. Ever a sucker for a damsel in distress, I agree to help her out, a favour that involves finding somebody called Dondl Fuzzlecutter, who lives in Baubleshire. Great. I've been here five minutes and I've already agreed to traffic drugs for a stranger. Forgoing the standard low-key approach to such nefarious activities, I wander the streets bellowing, "Has anyone seen Dondl Fuzzlecutter?", but there's no sign of either him or the mysterious Baubleshire.

POLES APART

Back at the pier, the friendly angler Brice Strongmend asks me if I can buy him a new fishing pole. What am I, an errand boy? Besides, the shop is spitting distance from where he's stood. Nevertheless, I tell him that I'll do it, before promptly walking off with his money.

Feeling a pang of guilt, I backtrack, buy the pole and

give it to Brice. He seems chuffed, letting me keep the change as well as his old pole. Somehow, the sultry Tacklemaster Moyna has also roped me into collecting some bait for her, in the form of ten centipedes, which can apparently be found near Baubleshire. Figuring that I'll kill two birds with one stone - or ten centipedes with an axe - I set sail for Baubleshire to hunt down the drug dealer and retrieve the arthropods.

NICE LEGS...

It's not really Barbarian work, but a man's got to earn a living. Besides, it's good to get out of the city, and Baubleshire is a breath of fresh air, all rolling hills and buxom wenches. One of these, a pert beauty called Lunae, greets me with a friendly: "Hail, Mctaggish." In what probably ranks as one of my less seductive chat-up lines, I counter with the perfunctory: "Where are the centipedes?"

Somewhat taken aback, Lunae replies: "By that tree behind you," before running off before I can thank her. Shithouse. Shattering my gentle giant image, in a moment of impotent rage I bludgeon a Woodland badger to death.

Astonished at my own

brutality but impressed by my power, I head for the aforementioned tree, beyond which there is indeed a collective noun of centipedes. Seeing as the badger went down with barely a whimper, this should be a breeze, and I set about the first one with relish. Seconds later, I'm left reeling as the little bastard spits poison into my eyes. It's suddenly a life and death struggle, and I just about manage to overcome the critter, having to take a good two-minute breather before tackling the next one.

Systematically attacking them, I establish a technique of shrouding myself in extra protection and kicking them in the head. Even so, it's an effort, and the sixth one downs me, leaving me for dead while fellow centipede-worriers ignore my bloated corpse.

Reviving myself (again), I finish the job in hand and finally deliver the goods to Moyna. And in return she gives me 23p and a fishing spear that I'm not qualified to use. That's the final straw. Piss-takers, the lot of them. Bidding a blunt farewell, I head for the hills, build a camp and cry myself to sleep. Dondl Fuzzlecutter can wait.

"Shattering my gentle giant image, in a moment of rage I bludgeon a Woodland badger to death"



"No, I don't want to sample your tackle."

HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

UP IN SMOKE



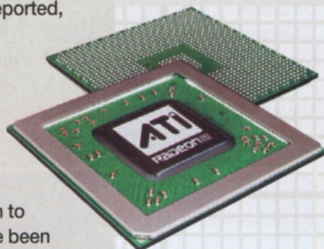
■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲ The PSU in my FX-53 went 'pop' the other day, filling my office with the rich carcinogenic smoke of superheated electrical components. Given that the machine was tucked underneath a desk on the other side of the room, and that the path between me and it was strewn with old motherboards, a dead monitor, a joystick and hamster (more about that later), I decided to take the shortest path and vault the desks.

In case you're picturing a cartoon nerd slipping on the desk surface doing an Inspector Clouseau through the window behind – you're wrong. I managed to get from one side of the room to the other without so much as a biro rolling onto the floor, which was something of a feat given the flatscreens, speakers, cables, phones and old plates in the way. I'm beginning to think I teleported, and once I've worked out how to repeat the process, I'm going to patent it and become extraordinarily rich. If I make billions, I might be able to afford an X850 XT Platinum.

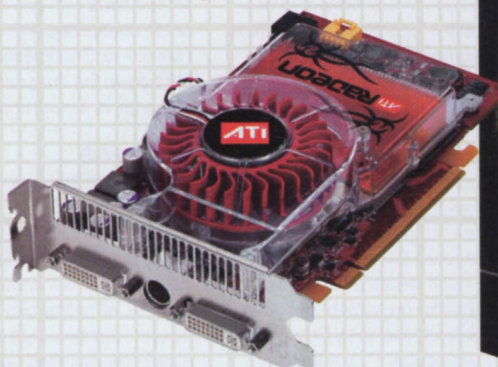
I'll also need some cash to rebuild the poor FX-53. I've been unable to determine whether the motherboard was damaged, and therefore whether the CPU and RAM are salvageable. The moral of this tale is, never skimp on key components whose destruction has a 'knock on' effect – like putting cheap tyres on a Continental GT. Spend decent money on a decent brand product, not £20 on a 600W unknown.

Ah yes, the hamster. She's not actually mine; I'm just minding her while her owners are away on their honeymoon. She spends a lot of the time fidgeting and squeaking round in her wheel, particularly late at night. I've found that the best solution is to play the airboat levels from *Half-Life 2*. It doesn't have any effect on her, but it sure sends me off...



NIFTY EIGHT FIFTY

Latest X-Series RADEON flagship aims to knock NVIDIA from the high-end throne



Slimboy fat: the X850 is the first RADEON card to demand a two-slot cooler.

OUT WITH THE old, in with the same. While the new RADEON X850 heralds the arrival of ATI's latest VPU and more MHz than ever before, there's nothing radical about the technology – the R480 predecessor on anabolic steroids, and so is more of a pumped up, stressed out X800 than anything especially fresh and exciting.

And who said steroids stunt your growth? As with the rival GeForce 6800 Ultra, the Platinum Edition (PE) variant has ballooned into a significantly larger, dual-slot design, with most of the space taken up with a revised cooler housing. Truth be told, the outgoing X800 XT PE always looked scrawny alongside the chunky NVIDIA cards, and doubling the card's girth has made it appear more brawny – you feel like you're

getting your money's worth. While 'muscular looks' won't appear on any official marketing literature, many buyers will find it just as compelling a feature as efficient heat dissipation.

Another hushed-up first for ATI is the X850's electric blanket-rivalling power requirements. Early testing suggests the card draws more current than any graphics card on sale today, so don't go thinking your 300W PSU can handle it. If you're fed-up with middling frame-rates and are looking to upgrade, avoid hungry heavyweights and go for the new X800 XL instead: it's the first decent RADEON response to our favourite GeForce 6800 GT, featuring 16 pipelines, 1GHz memory clock and a £250 price tag. It's the one to watch, and shouldn't lunch your power supply.

As we saw last month, ATI needs to shift more boxes to

frame-rate cravers. While the company's overall share is impressive, arch-rival NVIDIA has a clear advantage at the high end – with more people buying pricey models to play demanding titles, it's become an important market for both.

WHERE ART THOU?

Part of the problem is availability. Where the R420 is still hard to come by some six months after launch, ATI claims the R480 and R430 chips will be "in plentiful supply". While that may be true, the X850 range, X800 XL and vanilla X800 models all require a PCI-Express x16 slot. With the majority of Intel Pentium owners and most AMD Athlon owners still running AGP, the company will have to wait until mid-2006 before making any real inroads into NVIDIA's lead.

The one nagging doubt is that ATI's bloated line-up has become too confusing for buyers who don't understand all the small-scale variations between different RADEON cards – too much choice will only disorient the majority of ordinary PC users. That's another reason the slimmer GeForce range is managing to pull them in.

ATI: THE FULL LINE-UP

| | R480 | | | R430 | | R420 | | |
|-----------|------------|---------|----------|---------|--------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| | X850 XT PE | X850 XT | X850 PRO | X800 XL | X800 | X800 XT PE | X800 XT | X800 PRO |
| CORE | 540MHz | 520MHz | 520MHz | 400MHz | 400MHz | 520MHz | 500MHz | 475MHz |
| MEMORY | 1180MHz | 1080MHz | 1080MHz | 1000MHz | 700MHz | 1080MHz | 1000MHz | 900MHz |
| RAM | 256MB | 256MB | 256MB | 256MB | 128MB | 256MB | 256MB | 256MB |
| INTERFACE | PCIe | PCIe | PCIe | PCIe | PCIe | PCIe, AGP | PCIe, AGP | PCIe, AGP |
| PIPELINES | 16 | 16 | 12 | 16 | 12 | 16 | 16 | 12 |
| PRICE | £450† | £400† | £300† | £250† | £200† | £400 | £350 | £300 |

† Projected price



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REVIEWS

Groovy gamepads



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DEAR WANDY

He has the cure



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WATCHDOG

Sorting your woes



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BUYER'S GUIDE

Ker-ching! Get your gear here

LCD SEA

Flat panel-makers face oversupply problem, prices dropping as a result



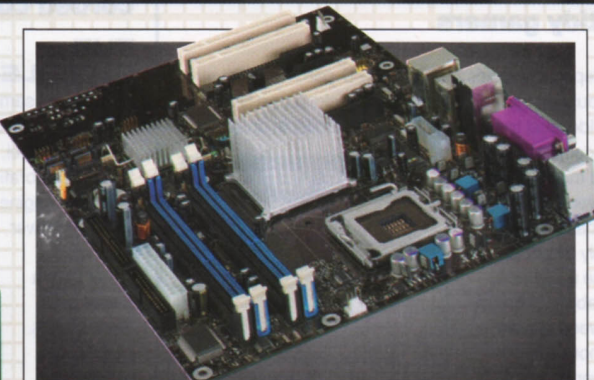
LG's gorgeous 19-inch L193SA - yours for £250?

DESPITE the world's leading finance firms shifting their TFT-LCD market forecast to a less gloomy outlook for 2005, the overall picture is of demand falling short of supply. Equipment manufacturers have seen unit costs tumble over the last month, with December's price drop leaving 15-inch screens at just £90.

While the UK high street has yet to see the real effect of these monthly cuts, Taiwan's annual computer and electronics fair suggested that some LCD bargains are at last heading our way. Held at the Taipei World Trade Centre, the fair is a popular venue for bargain hunters, and it was here that manufacturers including BenQ were predicting price cuts of £80 for its 19-inch models and £30 for 17-inch models, noting that many of the latter were already available for just over £150.

So while many mainstream 17-inch/16ms flat panel models

– for example, LG's L1715S and AOpen's F75JS – can be yours for £199 or less, you're really best off waiting another month, by which time the sticker price should be even more attractive.



Good card + good board = good value.

HAPPY COUPLE

Intel to bundle NVIDIA PCIe cards with its motherboards

IN A MOVE designed to promote Intel's PCI-Express motherboards and NVIDIA's PCI-Express video cards, the two companies have launched a joint marketing initiative. Without any overclocking features, Intel boards are unloved by the community with rivals including MSI, GIGABYTE and ABIT hogging all the reviews. Nonetheless, Intel's boards remain very capable and very reliable products chosen by Alienware, among countless others.

Although the campaign was set to finish on December 31 2004, distributors are likely to hold stock beyond that date and it shouldn't be hard to find bundled products available well into the new year. Under the initiative, Intel's D925XCV/BC, D925XECV2/BV2 or D915PBL/CY/CM boards will be supplied with our current mainstream champ, the GeForce 6600 GT. Retail prices were not available at the time of going to press, but it's likely that you can save between 5-10 per cent over buying the products separately.

SNIPPETS

MUTE NATION



QuietPC, the North Yorkshire computer retailer, understands how a noisy machine can be a nuisance – its entire range of products is designed to help you build a whisper-quiet PC or silence an existing one. Recent additions to the company's line-up include QTechnology's Ultra-Quiet ATX PSU 460W for a very reasonable £69, Silentmaxx's aluminium HDD enclosure for £32, and the £29 Super Flower from Zalman – at 120mm, almost 30mm larger than the existing model. www.quietpc.com

QUIET CUBE

Continuing the theme of hushing up technology, GeCube has announced its SilenCool Solution variant of the X700 PRO. The RADEON model features the manufacturer's own SilenCool dual-sided heatpipe technology, and unlike many rivals is of a single slot layout. GeCube markets the design for its ability to 'drastically reduce' the noise normally generated by a fan – a somewhat modest claim given that SilenCool is, as the name suggests, totally silent. www.gecube.com/mbu



HARD CELL

Samsung Electronics has released the world's first mobile phone with an integrated 1.5GB hard disk drive, the SPH-V5400. The device is able to store more than 1,000 images generated by its megapixel camera, or hundreds of MP3 files uploaded from your PC. The phone comes with a QVGA (Quarter VGA, 320x240) screen and is able to store and playback more than an hour of video. As if that weren't enough to suck in the gadget freaks, the SPH-V5400 also boasts dual speakers for fully 3D sound effects. Currently available in Korea only, we hope Samsung – now the world's second largest mobile manufacturer – will tailor the model for other markets some time in the coming months. www.samsung.com



DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | DESC | RELEASED | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|---------------------|------------|-----------|--------|--|
| Intel | INF Update Utility | 6.0.1.1002 | 7-May-04 | 1.5MB | support.intel.com |
| NVIDIA | Forceware | 5.10 | 17-Sep-04 | 26.8MB | www.nvidia.com |
| VIA | Hyperion 4in1 | 455vp1 | 25-Nov-04 | 1.4MB | www.viaarena.com |
| VIA | Hyperion Pro 64-bit | 0.99 Beta | 06-Aug-04 | 2.7MB | www.viaarena.com |

GRAPHICS

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | DESC | RELEASED | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-----------|--------|--|
| ATI | Display, Control Panel, WDM | CATALYST 4.11 | 12-Nov-04 | 26.1MB | www.ati.com |
| NVIDIA | Forceware | 66.93 | 09-Nov-04 | 17.8MB | www.nvidia.com |

SOUND

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | DESC | RELEASED | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|-----------------------------|---------|-----------|---------|--|
| Creative | Audigy 2/2 ZS Driver Update | 1-84-50 | 29-Jul-04 | 16.6MB | uk.europe.creative.com |
| M-Audio | Revolution | 1.0.2.8 | 13-Feb-04 | 10.16MB | m-audio.com |

CORDLESS RUMBLEPAD 2

■ £29 | Manufacturer: Logitech | Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.co.uk

Cordless gaming for tidy gamers

THE CORDLESS Rumblepad 2 features an eight-way D-pad, four primary and two secondary buttons, four shoulder triggers, two analogue sticks plus a flight mode selector and vibration toggle. Identical to the official Sony controller in quality and ergonomics, the device takes a couple of AA batteries – half the number of the old model – and works up to 30ft from the USB receiver. With Logitech's wireless transmitter on-board, the two power cells give the pad an agreeably meaty feel. Lopping off the cable might seem like a gimmick,

but the ability to toss it between players without knocking over your fizzy pop is a boon.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ No detectable lag
- ✓ Substantial feel
- ✓ Batteries supplied
- ✗ Meagre bundle

90

The wires-free winner

RUMBLEPAD 2

■ £24 | Manufacturer: Logitech | Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.co.uk

A top-quality corded controller

THE RUMBLEPAD 2

features the same button and stick layout as the Cordless model, though its vibration feedback engine is fed by power from USB rather than a pair of gold-top batteries.

Like its wireless brother, the build quality is matchless and the plastic of a high calibre, with the various triggers having a positive feel and the D-pad being less demanding on thumbs than its Sony equivalent. Unlike the Cordless, the plain Rumblepad 2 has rubber strips on its edges meaning even the sweatiest palms should have no trouble keeping it planted. The only obvious downside to the Rumblepad is that it's pretty much identical to the one that comes with your PlayStation.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ High quality build
- ✓ Long cable
- ✗ Sony controller costs less

80

Familiar look and feel

PRECISION GAMEPAD

■ £9 | Manufacturer: Logitech | Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.co.uk

Budget-conscious entry model

CHOOSING the Precision rather than the Rumblepad 2 means that while you'll be saving yourself 15 quid, you'll also be ditching the vibration feedback engine and losing the two analogue sticks. Accordingly, the device has fewer uses and feels a lot less weighty, as well as lacking the substantive feel of either its siblings or the Sony. That said, it has been designed with more casual gamers in mind – people who enjoy a weekend kick-about in FIFA or playing Worms after the pub shuts. It won't make you excel at Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, nor will it please PlayStation emulator devotees – if you're looking for an all-rounder, you need deeper pockets.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Decent enough quality
- ✓ Good money
- ✗ Lacks analogue sticks
- ✗ No feedback

77

Slightly insubstantial, slightly undesirable

USB DUAL PS2 TO PC CONVERTOR XP

■ £6.99 (plus PS2 Dual Shock pad approx £18) | Manufacturer: Joytech | Phone: 0845 800 1020 | www.play.com

Play PlayStation

MAY OF 2004 was a milestone for gaming – one hundred million PlayStations have been sold worldwide since the product's release in the early '90s, making it the most successful console of all time. If you were to place them all side by side, they would wrap round the earth five times. With so many owning one, it makes more sense to use the pad that came with it rather than lash out on another, virtually identical product.

Of course, you need a way of connecting it to your PC – and this is the gizmo. If you can put up with wires in the year 2005, the Sony pads are also among the best in the entire business. Pro Evo wouldn't be the same without them.



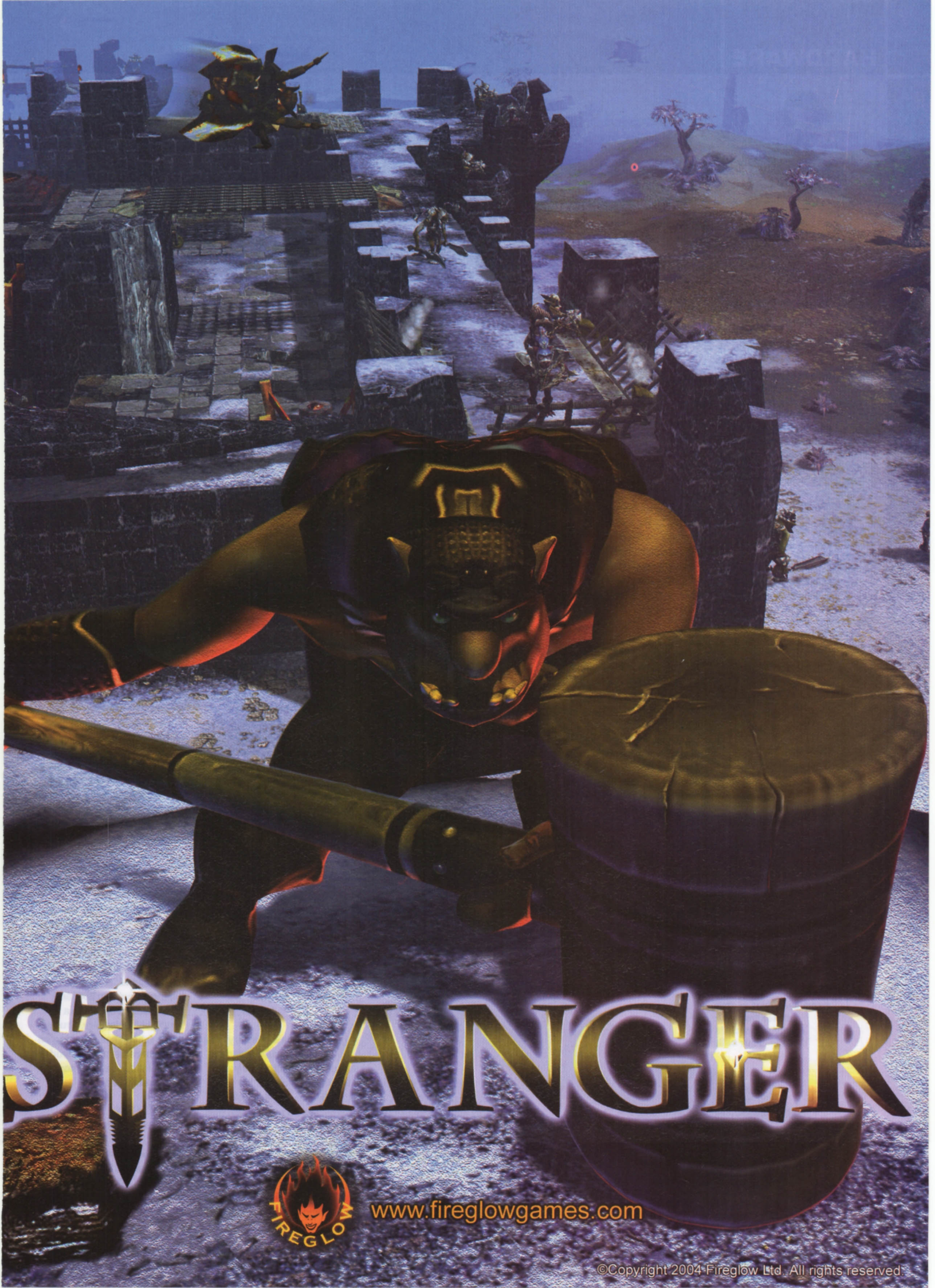
PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Superb pads
- ✓ A cheap option if you own a PS2...
- ✗ ...But expensive if you don't
- ✗ More cables

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If you can't beat 'em...





STRANGER



www.fireglowgames.com

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DEAR WANDY

Which graphics card to buy, *Half-Life 2* teething troubles, virus concerns and memory issues. Whatever you want to know, Wendy's sure to know the answer – he's clever like that...

■ **HE'S MAGIC:** Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wendy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wendy, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wendy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

CALL A CAB

Q I don't believe it! After waiting all this time, my back-ordered *Half-Life 2* DVD arrives from Special Reserve and won't install. It seems there are quite a few people with this problem: "Error 1335 the cabinet file HL32.CAB required for this installation is corrupt and cannot be used." The installation instructions are crap and there isn't even a manual supplied, just a very sad single sheet of bog roll. Help please! I'm going back to playing *Far Cry* until I hear from you.

Les Denovan

A You're leaning against an open door in your criticism of the manual. I'm not sure what possessed the publisher to drop a decent set of instructions and a dash of back-story in favour of a single sheet fob-off – it reminds me of the cheap stuff you get at Sunday markets and auto shows, where the instructions are produced on a photocopier that has had its 'Call Engineer' light on for the last 15 years. As for the error, well, you're in luck.

Error 1335 is a relatively common problem reported by the Windows Installer Service – it isn't something unique to you, nor to Valve's setup program. For the majority of *Half-Life 2* owners, the problem is an easy one to fix – you simply need to ensure that when you're

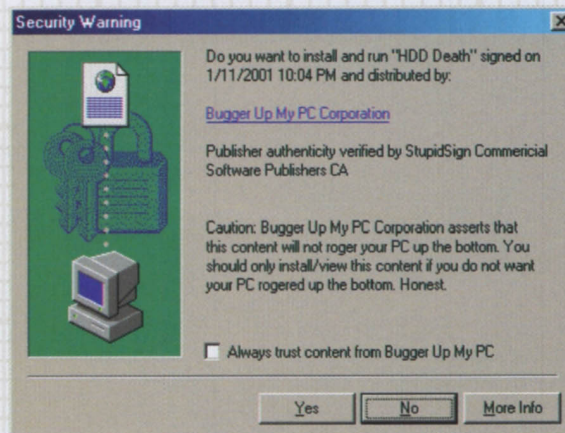
presented with the option to install *Half-Life 2* and *Counter-Strike: Source*, you make sure you put a check in both boxes. Even if you have the understandable urge to keep the whiney world of *Counter-Strike* from your computer, you still have to install it and then delete it once Steam starts (right-click its name, choose Properties, then Delete Local Content).

Of course, being Windows, it may not be that simple. There's a chance your DVD is dirty, so trying cleaning it and putting it back in the tray. If that doesn't help, it's possible that it's defective or just plain inferior – despite record profits, the larger publishers are constantly cutting corners and regularly drop the quality of their media.

If you're still unable to get the installer to run, there's a chance that your Windows Installer has become damaged in some way, so you need to update it. My advice would be to Google for KB884016 – this is the id of a Microsoft Knowledgebase article on Windows Installer 3.0 – and grab the new version from there.

SELECTIVE AMNESIA

Q Some time ago I purchased a Dell 4500 with 2GHz Pentium 4 and 256MB RAM



Make sure you're adequately protected before going online.

for additional memory specifications. It arrived and I placed it in the spare memory slot and restarted the system. Three beeps later, nothing. I checked with the supplier, who confirmed that all memory was tested before dispatch. In an email, they suggested I check the details of my motherboard to see if they could supply compatible memory. I've tried this and cannot establish my configuration, despite many trips inside the box and Properties tabs on the Control Panel.

I've tried both Intel's and Dell's websites, but to no avail. All I want to do is add some reasonably-priced memory to my computer and I now seem stuck trying to establish what I can buy that will actually work. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

Andrew Morgan

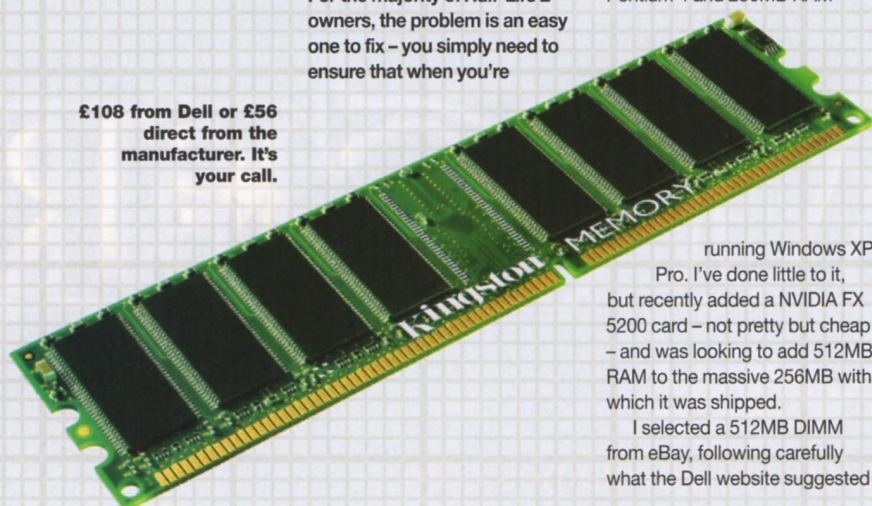
but before looking at what memory you might need, you need to check how much you can buy – there's no point tooling yourself up with new RAM if it exceeds what the motherboard can handle.

Dell's documentation site at docs.euro.dell.com lists out technical specifications for all Dell systems past and present, and it informs us that the RAM ceiling is 1GB for your Dimension 4500. So far so good.

Moving on to the Services & Support section, the memory selector therein suggests a single PC2100 512MB Kingston DIMM for a cost of around £108. My suggestion would be to visit Crucial at www.crucial.com/uk and run through its selector instead – a chip of identical specification here will cost you £56, and where Dell quote up to a fortnight for delivery, Crucial never fail to have the thing on your doormat the next working day. All that's needed now is your credit card...

OUTBREAK

Q I have an Athlon 2000+ with a GeForce Ti4200. I'm not sure about the motherboard, but I know have 512MB RAM. The problem is, I think my system is decimated by viruses – it's very slow and I can't connect to the



£108 from Dell or £56 direct from the manufacturer. It's your call.

running Windows XP Pro. I've done little to it, but recently added a NVIDIA FX 5200 card – not pretty but cheap – and was looking to add 512MB RAM to the massive 256MB with which it was shipped.

I selected a 512MB DIMM from eBay, following carefully what the Dell website suggested

A Finding new memory for a mainstream Dell model shouldn't be difficult. If you know where to look, it's actually one of the simplest upgrades you can do. Not only that, but given the relatively small outlay, it's also the most rewarding – especially if you've been running less than 512MB in the first place.

You did the right thing in consulting the Dell website,

"In Wandy Towers, every machine I've peered at over the last six weeks has been infested with viruses and spyware"

Internet for more than 30 seconds before it displays a DNS error. It says something about 'Active Control Displays cannot be displayed'. I therefore cannot purchase *Half-Life 2*, as you need to go online to authorise the code! Would having the best anti-virus software restore the PC to where it was? And what would you recommend as a replacement machine system – my budget would be up to £2,000?

Martin Hulston

A I think you're saying that although you have an Internet connection, you don't have an anti-virus product. How brave of you! These days, pretty much every odd symptom – random disconnects, strange errors relating to your connection and so on – are down to malicious code picked up when online.

Wandy Towers is a sanatorium for sick PCs, and every machine I've peered at over the course of the last six weeks has been infested with viruses and spyware – the owners are not only unaware that they're hosting porn diallers and Trojans, but that the bastard things have been causing all their problems. On the bright side, most people go away with fully functioning machines and an intact My Documents folder – but it takes time and experience to clean things by hand.

In your situation, the first thing to do is ditch Internet Explorer and use Firefox instead. I'm not sure what 'Active Control Displays cannot be displayed' means, but I have a good idea you're referring to ActiveX controls, the most well-known infection path for any Windows system, and Firefox just ignores them.

The next thing to do is get yourself a copy of NOD32 by calling Aspect Systems, the UK's exclusive distributor for

free on 0800 1380 802 – if you find Firefox allows you to stay online, you can buy NOD32 from www.eset.com and then visit www.lavasoft.de for a free copy of Ad-Aware.

As for the replacement system, go for any AMD64-based PC with an X800 XT or 6800 GT/Ultra. If you can stretch to an extra £200, you can get an FX-55.

POWER RANGER

Q I saved my pennies, read the Buyer's Guide reviews and was about to get an FX 5900 XT when I happened to notice the system requirements on the NVIDIA website. The problem is the 250W PSU in my 1.8GHz Dimension 8200 – the new GeForce needs 300W! Bang went that idea. Although I'm up to changing a graphics card, I don't want to start ripping out the power supply. I've been very happy with my GeForce3, but it's getting a bit long in the tooth.

The question therefore is, how to upgrade my graphics within the confines of my not-very-old system? A browse of several websites suggests that the best I can go to is a 5600. Am I correct in this, or do you have any suggestions? Am I going to be able to achieve anything significantly better than my old GeForce? As you may have surmised, I am a

committed NVIDIA user. I suppose there's always the option of a new system, but the kids would feel a bit disappointed come Christmas morning!

Tony Coleman

A I'd choose a Sparkle 6600 GT over the FX 5900 XT – and don't get too worried about the PSU issue until after you're up and running with the new card. While that may sound like hugely bad advice, I've been running a Radeon 9800 Pro in an old 250W desktop chassis for some time – like the 5900, the 9800 requires a 300W supply, yet I've not had a single problem. I've expected trouble, of course, but since I'm not wringing out every one of those watts with a CD-RW burner, USB modem, ten-case fans and so on, the trouble never turned up. And in any case, swapping out a power supply in the event of one being required is no big deal.

Like every other component inside your case, a replacement PSU is designed to meet strict guidelines – buy a decent new one such as a Tagan and everything will swap over, like for like. But as I've said, you may find that if you're not stressing your old Dell, the 6600 GT will sit there very happily. Sometimes, the most sensible advice is to just suck it and see. [X]

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com



Sparkle's 6600 GT, our Recommended mainstream card, is now available with AGP.

GURGITATE FREEMAN

MOTION SICKNESS IS MAKING THOUSANDS OF HALF-LIFE 2 GAMERS' LIVES A MISERY. HERE'S A LIST OF THINGS YOU CAN TRY TO NEUTRALISE THE NAUSEA...

Yes, you read that right, *Half-Life 2* is making people throw up. Nobody fully understands what's causing the problem, but what's certain is that large numbers of Gordon Freemans are turning green and drawing deep breaths – and I'm one of them. Just as I can't look at a glass of Southern Comfort, I can't look at a single frame of the game without feeling queasy. It's nature's way of avoiding a lumpy keyboard.

Messages posted by Valve employees claim that low refresh rates are to blame for what's obviously a form of motion sickness, and that increasing them should help. You might save yourself a headache, the symptom most commonly associated with a slow screen, but the unsteady eyes, sweaty brow and leaden stomach isn't only affecting people with crappy monitors – everyone from owners of high quality CRT products (ie 100Hz and above) to flat LCD panels are calling in sick. Refresh rates are not a magical cure-all. Here are my top tips for avoiding the *Half-Life* hurl...

• Take regular breaks every 10-15 minutes.

Look away from the screen and focus on the furthest thing you can see.

- Don't play if you're feeling tired. You're a lot less likely to suffer if you're feeling bright and awake.
- Make sure you play in plenty of ambient light. Switch on the main lamp in your room, and if you have one, a desk lamp closer to your screen.
- Decrease the contrast levels of your monitor and increase the gamma within the game.
- Increase your field of view. In the Source console (you will need to enable it from the Keyboard tab of the Options screen), type `sv_cheats 1`, followed by `FOV 90`. If that doesn't help, try `FOV 105` instead.
- Also in the console, type `cl_bob 0`, `cl_bobcycle 0` and `cl_bobup`. These stop your character from bobbing up and down as he walks, but I've been unable to make them have any effect. Anyone?
- Make sure vertical synchronisation (V-SYNC) is enabled in your Display Properties, and that your screen is set to refresh at the maximum possible rate.
- Right-click on *Half-Life 2* in Steam, choose Properties, click Launch Options, then enter `-refresh` followed by the refresh rate of your monitor. For example, `-refresh 100`.
- Try turning off anisotropic filtering and antialiasing, then lower the resolution. This should increase your frame-rate dramatically.
- Drink carbonated water and stay away from fatty foods when playing.





WATCHDOG

Companies not playing fair? Shame on them. Write in and let us know, and we'll send the boys round. Well, a bloke who's a bit annoyed at any rate...

■ **HELPING HAND** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry - we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP
EMAIL Alternatively, email us at mailbox@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing into complain about a product, please furnish us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.



Make sure Bulldog can deliver before you sign up.

A LOAD OF BULL...

When is a great offer not a great offer? When your name's Gordon Baker. He's been lacking an Internet connection for weeks now. Why? Well, he was tempted away from Tiscali by one of Bulldog Broadband's adverts. He fell hook, line and sinker for its promise of a glorious four meg service and promptly cancelled his Tiscali account to cuddle up with the competition.

There were problems from the off though, when Gordon

Gordon. "I've checked the website and it doesn't mention any of this or the fact that I'd have to wait this long. I don't understand how Bulldog can advertise this service but make me wait over two months for it."

Agreed, Gordon. So what does Bulldog Broadband have to say for itself? Unlike its dealings with Gordon, Bulldog got back to us very quickly (which is genuinely appreciated - take note E-buyer). "We sincerely regret the delay in provisioning Mr Baker's four meg service," says a

IN THE DOG HOUSE

SOME COMPANIES APPEAR TO BAULK AT THE IDEA OF RESPONDING TO US. HERE'S WHERE THEY LIVE...

ACER

THE COMPLAINT - Knowing that *Half-Life 2* was on its way, reader Marc Clare splashed out on a rather spiffy Acer projector with all the trimmings to create the best set-up. "Problem is, when it arrived from the re-seller, it was 'Dead on Arrival'," explains Marc. He

Here lies the body of Acer's customer service. May it rest in peace...



phoned up Acer and was told it would be repaired or replaced within 72 hours. Not quite - despite Acer's assurances, it's been more like three weeks. And still counting...

THE PURSUIT - We called up Acer's customer service dept and after negotiating a terrifying array of multiple choices (oh, joy), we found ourselves sixth in the queue. But we don't like queueing, so we dispatched an email to the company instead.

THE VERDICT - Not a peep. Two bits of advice Acer... First, get back to your customers with definite dates and not empty promises. Second, check your inbox every now and again.

spokesperson for the company. "In light of this, we will be offering Mr Baker a free broadband service until we can deliver the service he originally purchased."

Bulldog finishes off by saying that: "As a company, we're totally committed to maintaining a high level of

customer service and apologise to Mr Baker for the delay and any inconvenience that this may have caused him."

What Bulldog didn't address though, was the issue of advertising a service that, in Gordon's case at least, it was (and at the time of going to press) unable to provide. **WZ**

"How can Bulldog advertise this service and then make me wait over two months for it?"

GORDON BAKER IS AT THE END OF HIS TETHER

was charged £65 twice after he tried to sign up. Never mind he thought, it should be plain sailing from now on. That was on September 16 and over two months later, Gordon was still waiting to be connected.

"I've emailed Bulldog on five different occasions and have received no response," explains Gordon. "I've phoned them seven times and after waiting for ages, I got told the same story - they're waiting for ports to become available at the local exchange. And that's it."

Bulldog did get back to him once after he complained, but otherwise, he's heard zip. "So I have to keep waiting and hope a port becomes available," sighs

THE ACCUSED



GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

CREATIVE
HITACHI

▲ **THEY ARE OUT THERE - THOSE COMPANIES WHO BEND OVER BACKWARDS TO HELP OUT THEIR CUSTOMERS. STEP FORWARD CREATIVE AND HITACHI...**

Ah, pity his poor neighbours - reader Shaun Connolly purchased the rather kick-ass Creative Megaworks THX 5.1 550 speaker system, but any dreams of bringing down the house while shooting things in the face were dashed once he'd hooked it up to his PC.

"All I could hear from all the channels was a loud hiss," recalls Shaun. "After spending hours tawling the Internet for a possible solution, it became clear that the speakers must be faulty."

He dropped Creative a line and after speaking with "a very cheerful guy", it was decided that the best course of action would be to send a replacement subwoofer. "This conversation took place on Friday November 5," says Shaun. "Only three working days later, I received not only a replacement subwoofer, but also a complete set of five satellite speakers, remote control and so on. Now that's what I call customer service!"

Another company that seems to be happy to deliver customer service at the speed of light - well, at the speed of a courier at least - is Hitachi. Reader Carl Gurgan was having a problem with his Hitachi monitor, which was getting into the bad habit of switching itself off and displaying an intriguing blue snow effect on black areas. "I rang Hitachi, and the company told me they'd swap the old unit for a new one," says Carl. "But the best bit is that Hitachi is also sending a courier to my door to do this! I phoned on Tuesday and my replacement monitor will be here on Thursday." The most impressive part of Hitachi's service in Carl's eyes though, is that he's based in Northern Ireland: "I hope you agree that this is over and above the call of duty, so well done Hitachi!" Well done indeed.



Too fast to chase

LG's new 17" FLATRON monitors zoom past the competition with a response time of 12ms, far exceeding the 16ms-25ms you'll find with other monitors. At that speed, even the most intense action stays crisp and clear with less ghosting than ever before.



FLATRON 17" TFT LCD
Monitors L1730P, L1730B
and L1730S



www.lge.co.uk

BUYER'S GUIDE

Was your New Year's resolution to upgrade your kit? If so, you've come to the right place...

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product

that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great

product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

MOTHERBOARDS



A8V DELUXE WIRELESS

STREET PRICE £86

MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK

TELEPHONE 0870 1208 340

WEBSITE uk.asus.com

For the first time, an AMD board takes gold. Based on the VIA K8T800 Pro chipset, the ASUS A8V supports 939-pin Athlon 64 and FX processors (the engines behind the best gaming systems), and up to 4GB of dual-channel PC3200 RAM. Onboard dual RAID, 7.1 sound, automated overclocking and AGP8X complete the picture. The Wireless Edition comes bundled with more.

WAS £99
NOW £86



K8N NEO2 PLATINUM

STREET PRICE £96

MANUFACTURER Micro-Star

TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

MSI's K8N Neo has always boasted stability and performance, and the new 939-pin, nForce3 Ultra variant is just as impressive. The Neo2 supports the new Athlon 64 and FX-53 processors and incorporates a dual-channel memory controller. The board includes 7.1 sound, Gigabit LAN, 8 USB 2.0 ports, 2 x ATA and 4 x SATA connectors. Multi-function RAID is also standard.



IC7-MAX3

STREET PRICE £123

MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Getting on a bit now, the Canterwood-based IC7-MAX3 still provides a solid foundation for any Socket 478 Pentium-based games rig. It even looks great. The board has 5.1 onboard audio with optical out, Gigabit LAN, four-port SATA RAID, and ABIT's usual array of enthusiast-friendly features including SoftMenu Overclocking and OTES cooling. It's a real power-user's delight. If you don't want to stray from Intel, look no further.

PROCESSORS



ATHLON 64 3500

STREET PRICE £180

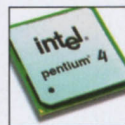
MANUFACTURER AMD

TELEPHONE 01276 803100

WEBSITE www.amd.com

Now the 939-pin chips no longer require registered memory, the AMD64 route is a cheaper option. Smash open your old Pentium PC, snatch the PC3200 sticks from its banks and mate them with a new Athlon on an A8V Deluxe. Although the Hyper-Threading alternatives can be better for business and encoding apps, the 64-bit chips are great for gaming, the 3500 giving best value. Die-hard Intel fans are missing out.

WAS £235
NOW £180



P4 3.2GHZ

STREET PRICE £142

MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403000

WEBSITE www.intel.com

With the price of the 3.0GHz now dropping to well below £200, it makes sense to spend just a little extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-Threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory can make its presence felt. If you have a P4 motherboard, you're already set for an upgrade to remember.

WAS £220
NOW £142



ATHLON 64 4000+

STREET PRICE £480

MANUFACTURER AMD

TELEPHONE 01276 803100

WEBSITE www.amd.com

Although the FX-55 is AMD's hottest tamale, it's more expensive than the 939-pin, 2.4GHz, ClawHammer-based Athlon 64 4000+ chip. And if you're thinking those specs look oddly familiar, full marks: the 4000+ is a rebadged FX-53 with its price shaved by £50, making it the slightly saner choice. Mind you, if you're looking to spend this kind of money, finding the extra nifty for the full-on FX-55 might not be an issue...

WAS £550
NOW £480

HDDS



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £57

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.

WAS £64
NOW £57



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £36

MANUFACTURER Maxtor

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you can jump up a size. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.

WAS £54
NOW £36



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £73

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

GRAPHICS CARD



GEFORCE 6800 GT

STREET PRICE £299

MANUFACTURER XFX Graphics

TELEPHONE 01327 315750

WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk

The release of *Doom 3* means that NVIDIA couldn't have timed its return to the top better. The 6800 GT is a slight step down from its über-Ultra card in terms of performance (only by a few frames per second), but at under £300 it gives you much better value for money. If you can afford the not insignificant outlay, this is the card to buy – and your games will love you forever.

WAS £399
NOW £299



GEFORCE 6600GT

STREET PRICE £139

MANUFACTURER Sparkle

TELEPHONE 0191 4210166

WEBSITE www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

Never before has such high performance been available at such a low price. Forget the old mainstream NVIDIA technology, the new stuff is quicker than many of the old high-end cards, and in many tests this 6600 GT beats the FX 5950 Ultra – pair it with an AMD64 and you're laughing. Sparkle's bundle is on the mean side, but we've not yet found a GeForce maker who builds to a higher standard.

WAS £199
NOW £139



RADEON 9800XT 256MB

STREET PRICE £191

MANUFACTURER ASUS

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.asus.com

With mainstream cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we give some space to the fastest card on the market: the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the requisite 300 quid burning a hole in your pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for *Half-Life 2*, redeemable when the game's released.

SOUNDCARDS



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £90

MANUFACTURER M-Audio

TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100

WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.

WAS £129
NOW £90



AUDIGY 2 ZS

STREET PRICE £58

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.

WAS £67
NOW £58



AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO

STREET PRICE £144

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.



World's Most Powerful VGA ever...

| EDITOR'S CHOICE | | RECOMMENDED | | ALSO CONSIDER | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|-----------|
|  | MX500 STREET PRICE £34 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button and two thumb buttons that speed up Web navigation. |  | OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE STREET PRICE £17 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse and have fond memories of a time when three-clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus, the latest optical technology means it works anywhere. |  | MX700 STREET PRICE £47 MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash. | MICE |
|  | INTERNET NAVIGATOR STREET PRICE £21 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and feel nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the Web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back. |  | INTERNET KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £15 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else. |  | PRO KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £46 MANUFACTURER Apple TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010 WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons. | KEYBOARDS |
|  | CYBORG EVO STREET PRICE £25 MANUFACTURER Saitek TELEPHONE 01454 451900 WEBSITE www.saitek.com A welcome new look for Saitek, with the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner. |  | CYBORG 3D GOLD STREET PRICE £22 MANUFACTURER Saitek TELEPHONE 01454 451900 WEBSITE www.saitek.com A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price, you'd be daft not to. |  | HOTAS COUGAR STREET PRICE £249 MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881 WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own. | JOYSTICKS |
|  | INSPIRE P580 5.1 STREET PRICE £56 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six-speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. What's more, this latest design includes a headphone jack too. |  | Z-640 STREET PRICE £58 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – if you're a basshead, you'll love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame. |  | MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550 STREET PRICE £180 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that make you leap out of your seat. | SPEAKERS |
|  | FLATRON L1730P STREET PRICE £355 MANUFACTURER LG TELEPHONE 0870 607 5544 WEBSITE uk.lge.com If you're after speed, quality and features, the 17-inch Flatron L1730P is the one to covet. It boasts a 12ms response time, has an amazing picture, a range of colour presets, detachable two-port USB hub and is TCO-03 compliant to boot. This accreditation means there's height and tilt adjust, plus the screen is lit uniformly – it's noticeably a superior image. The only drawback is the price, and the pivot feature won't interest gamers. |  | CML174SXW STREET PRICE £340 MANUFACTURER Hitachi TELEPHONE 01628 585000 WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com We still think the 17-inch CML is one of the best-looking, best-performing flat screens on the market – even though it remains over £300. It delivers a great-quality image, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in a choice of colours to match your kit. If you're wanting to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the sensible, slim bezel Hitachi remains a solid choice. |  | VISIONMASTER PRO 514 STREET PRICE £398 MANUFACTURER Iiyama TELEPHONE 01438 745482 WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz – and so ideal for gaming. | SCREENS |
|  | EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET STREET PRICE £15 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk This fits all the criteria for a gaming headset: it's comfortable (so you can spend hours shouting at your team-mates without feeling you've been cuffed round the ear), the boom comes with an easy-to-position ratchet and it sports a noise-cancelling microphone with excellent voice reproduction. The cable's a bit short, but that's the only drawback – and at this price, it's a steal. |  | HS300 STREET PRICE £11 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE europe.creative.com Light and comfortable and with impressive audio considering the rock-bottom price, the Creative HS300's are well worth considering. Sound is rounded, with a decent scoop of bass, and while they can't match the Logitech Extreme for voice quality, your message still comes across loud and clear. If you're strapped for cash, consider these. |  | AUDIO 90 STREET PRICE £23 MANUFACTURER Plantronics TELEPHONE 0800 410014 WEBSITE www.plantronics.co.uk If your life is online gaming, you need a headset you can wear without developing earache – and the Audio 90 is the most comfortable set out of all the ones we've tested. The secret lies in the fact that you can pivot the speakers, which means they sit flush on your ear and block out any outside noise. Not the most stylish set on the market, but eminently functional. | HEADSETS |

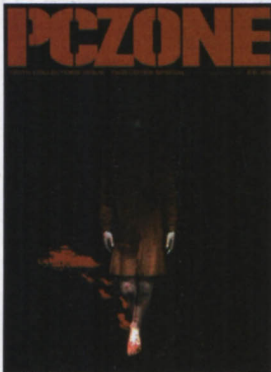


MAILBOX

EMAIL YOUR RANTS TO
MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

Steam – it's coming out of many orifices after the trials of installing *Half-Life 2*...

■ WIND-POWERED Dave Woods



We can smell the F.E.A.R. from here. Can you?

traced back to the Pressilly clan of Aberystwyth.

TOILET HUMOUR

In your last issue you said: "If you're reading this on any day after November 16, then for God's sake man put *PC ZONE* down and play *Half-Life 2* instead, we won't be offended." Well I would, but I'm having a poo at the moment and although I have a wireless keyboard and mouse, I can't see the screen from here...

S Scoltock

WILDSTYLE

I'd like to introduce a new art style which I call 'CrowBar Art' or 'Crow Art' for short. After watching *Faking It* with this guy who has to fake being a graffiti artist, I slapped on *Half-Life 2*, whipped out my crowbar and started experimenting...

Joshua Brown-Martin

WHINGER

Dear Paul Presley, Are you aware that the character you created for *EverQuest II* in issue 149 looks exactly like footballer John Hartson? I know you're a ginger, but perhaps you subconsciously want to be Welsh as well?

Sam Morris

Rumbled. I've checked with Prez and he claims that the Presley name can, in fact, be

TESTING, TESTING...

I'm looking for some information about how to become a games



Joshua Brown-Martin has seen the writing on the wall.

tester. Would it be possible for you to tell me how to go about starting? Any help you can give me would be great.

Stephen Marr

Now where were you when issue 147 was on-sale? We had a huge feature on the self-same subject. Give our back issues dept a call on 0870 4420 957.

WE LOVE HALF-LIFE 2!

Wow! I take it all back! Seconds after moaning that *Half-Life 2* wasn't available, it went live. I don't know what to say: I've never been so enthralled by a FPS environment and I've not even got a weapon yet! The graphics are incredible too: human skin that looks like human skin? The physics is spot-on too. But the clincher for me is the facial animation – incredible, emotive stuff. Valve must be so proud...

Mark Bell

Finally the world's greatest game has been released, and I've got to say that it's definitely been worth the wait! Both the gameplay and graphics are incredible. Best of all is the superb Gravity Gun. In fact, it's so good I decided to write this rhyme about it...

Smash every crate,
break every door.
Crush those boxes
into the floor.
Throw that table,
launch that chair.
Chuck a bloody
great sofa into the air.
Laugh as you watch
grown men fall,
Or break their bones
against a wall.
If you're meeting
guards at every turn,
lob a gas tank and
watch them burn.
When faced
by head crabs
do not flee,

BANNED!

In a bid to make these pages even more exciting, we're flexing our dictatorial muscle and exorcising certain dead topics. Write to us about these topics and we won't print your letter, and we definitely won't send you a graphics card. You have been warned...

■ Steam. I hate it/it doesn't work/it infringes on my civil liberties. At least until the next big Valve release.

■ Have I won the 150th Issue Giant Quiz? We don't know, we're still marking the thousands of entries...

'cause you're armed with the power of gravity. It's really them who're in deep trouble, as you bury them under a pile of rubble. With this new toy you can go to town, making use of everything that's not nailed down. It's so damn useful and so much fun – the fantastic, the amazing Gravity Gun!

Sech

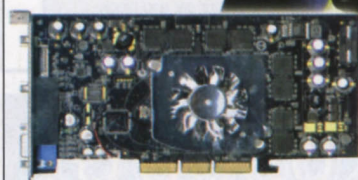
Check out our Feedback section for more praise on what is, most definitely, the best shooter of all time. But it's not all good news...

SEND US A LETTER AND WIN A TOP-OF-THE-RANGE GRAPHICS CARD

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, FUTURE PUBLISHING, 99 BAKER ST, LONDON, W1U 6PP OR MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The new XFX 5900 XT is one of the best graphics cards we've ever reviewed, with extreme overclocking, ludicrously fast memory and ultra cooling. Write us a letter and if we think it's the pick of the month, we'll send you one to stick in your PC. What are you waiting for?

WIN!
A TOP
GRAPHICS
CARD



The new Top Shop catalogue had an edgy feel.



Nice gun, but what's with the tea cosy?



Is this the most talked-about game ever?



Steam technicians get theirs.



WE HATE STEAM

Half-Life 2 – the best first-person shooter ever – so I've heard. I went out and bought a copy from my local games store this week. "You need to register it online before you can play it," I was told. Fair do's I thought – it's a good way to cut down on piracy etc.

"I'm just going to install this game on the computer," I told my missus as she went up to bed. Won't take long I thought, so I connected to the Internet with my trusty old 56K and started to install *HL2*. That was nearly an hour ago. And here I am still waiting while 'Steam unlocks game files'. Up to about 85 per cent now, but hell it's slow. So, *HL2*. Best FPS ever? Don't know. Definitely the longest it's ever taken me to install/load a game (including the old days of the ZX Spectrum)!

Andy Heaps

I was so pleased that *Half-Life 2* had arrived, and then so annoyed at the install. Is it truly necessary to have to log on every time I want to play the game? And the initial install took over an hour after pointless Steam updates on my ancient dial-up modem.

I appreciate that Valve is trying to protect its investment, but as with most copy protection, it only ends up annoying the legitimate purchasers. If this is

the future of game protection, I don't think I want to play anymore.

Mark

Steam authentication? Steaming pile of bullshit I say. So what happens to people who bought *HL2* and don't have an Internet connection? Or people like me – I'm online on my old P133 with a 56K modem so that my games PC doesn't get exposed to Web nastiness.

I don't care nor do I have time for online play, I have a job and a life... And a budget. So I should be able to play 'straight out of the box'. Even Microsoft enables you to activate over the phone. I might sell the game with the ATI voucher to someone who has broadband, and I don't give a f*** if I break some licence agreement in doing so.

DDP

I just tried to install *Half-Life 2*. Frankly, I found the process worse than installing Windows. I mean, who does Valve think it is? I bought a game and have ended up with a piece of software that runs on Start Up, eating valuable system resources and seems to have taken over my computer. I object to being forced to register Windows, but to be expected to go through all the same hassle and more for a game! Can your reviewers warn us of things like this in the future?

Nat

After reading your review of *Half-Life 2*, I was entranced and bought the game – only to be confronted by Steam. Five days later and I still haven't been able to play it. Since your magazine is the only gaming magazine that's consistently excellent, and that it's your score on *HL2*'s front cover, I wonder whether you could at least have a chat with Valve and ask them just what the hell's going on?

I understand Steam is overloaded, but how long do you have to wait just to play a frigging game that you've already paid for? Best game in the world? I haven't got a clue. But at this stage, I couldn't care less. No game is worth this much hassle.

Chris

Half-Life 2 has completely split you in two. You love the game. You hate Steam. As far as Valve is concerned, piracy is such a major issue, it's been forced to go down the Steam route. I don't think that forcing you to connect to the Internet is the answer, and unfortunately Valve is setting itself up as a bright red target for the hacking community – they like nothing more than a challenge and that's exactly what Valve has set them, in the most public way possible. Check

out the Online news on page 100 for the latest. And check our back page for a novel new way of buying PC ZONE. [X]

LETTER OF THE MONTH

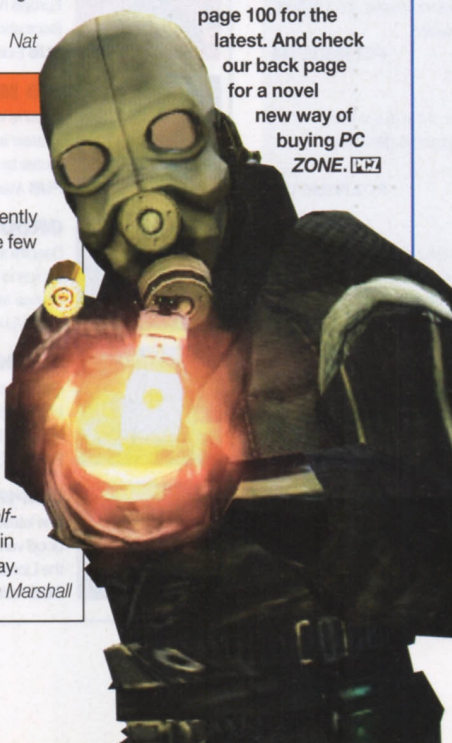
COMPUTER SAYS NO...

I'm sure you'll get a thousand letters like this, but I just need to voice my discontent...

So *Half-Life 2* finally gets released, and my copy is currently sitting in a drawer, unplayed. Why? Because I'm one of the few people in this country who has no Internet connection at home. As such, I'm left with two options in order to get Valve's epic working. I can either pack up my PC and trek halfway across London to my brother's house; or go out and buy 50ft of telephone cable and stretch it across to my nutty neighbour's house.

Now, I'm all for clamping down on the pirates, but when I can't play a game I've bought completely legally, I feel like I'm being victimised. I've never been tempted to buy a cracked/pirated game before, but quite frankly I'd jump at the chance right now – so long as I can play *Half-Life 2* on my PC. That is, after all, why I forked out 30 quid in the first place. Congratulations, Valve. You've ruined my day.

Dan Marshall



BACKCHAT



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

It's time to wave goodbye to the palsied, shuffling carcass that was 2004 and cut the umbilical cord of 2005. But how are you going to make sure that this year really counts? We visited our forums and asked for your resolutions. This is what you had to say...

Rich

1. Not to buy another *Sims* game. I was lured by *The Sims 2* and feel dirty.
2. Not to cause blood to gush from my finger again after attempting to repair my PC.
3. To buy *GTA: San Andreas* as soon as it's out on PC.

Csdaveuk

1. To finally get round to playing *Gothic* and *Gothic II*.
2. To complete every game I buy.
3. Not to play *Diablo II* for an entire year.

fyska

To fangirl *B&W2* until release, and then hug it all the way home before shoving it in my CD drive and playing for 24 hours straight, or until I get repetitive strain injury. Again.

The_many

I intend to play *Half-Life 2* at some point.

Jeren

1. To cut down on my use of 'lol' when online. I've reached the stage where I place it at the end of nearly every sentence.
2. To avoid pointing out the obvious ineptitudes of people that happen to have a bigger ship than me in *EVE Online*.
3. To acquire something I heard about called a 'life' and use my level 4 science skill to combine it with 'fresh air' to construct the ultimate weapon. Possibly.

Jason_6780

To join a gym – I've got a 'non-slim figure' due to playing too many PC games.

Reverend_Joseph

1. To finally assemble my über-fantastico clan. The one I've been telling myself I'll start for six or seven years.
2. To finish one of the gazillions of FPS maps I've started and discarded over the years.
3. To upgrade to two gigs of RAM.

Madameye

To replace the fan on my motherboard that sounds like a dying elephant.

Spudy2000

1. Buy more RAM!
2. Play games as much, if not more than this year.
3. No more buying average games on impulse – I'm going to save up for the good ones.

Collettd

1. To finally splash out on a new PC – one that doesn't go out of date in three months.
2. To convince myself that there are other games in the world besides *Half-Life 2*.
3. To catch up with the sun.

Goattail

Stop buying new games until I've finished the ones I've got. I don't care if it got a bloody PC ZONE Essential/Classic award. I said LEAVE IT.

THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

HALF-LIFE 2



We always knew that somewhere within our PC there was the potential for absolute, outright brilliance – and now Valve's cracked it. *Half-Life 2* is a masterpiece, and a game that won't be trumped for a long, long time. Maybe not even until *Half-Life 3*. With physics, design, art and ambience to die for, this sequel builds on its Black Mesa roots with stunning aplomb. Gordon Freeman, we salute you.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Valve
PCZ ISSUE 148



FAR CRY

Far Cry may be several notches beneath *Half-Life 2*, but it remains an outstanding and exhilarating experience that pushes your rig and your nerves to their limits. The narrative may be iffy, but *Far Cry* is a cracking achievement.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140



DOOM 3

Technologically dazzling, genuinely shock-providing and resolutely back to basics: *Doom 3* may not bring anything new to the FPS table, but it's still a stunning thrill-ride that every PC gamer should sample.

PUB Activision **DEV** id software
PCZ ISSUE 146



CALL OF DUTY

With an excellent expansion in the form of *United Offensive*, *Call Of Duty* remains the best war game on the PC – and possibly of all time. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread and excitement, it's an absolute must-play.

PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE 136



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy
PCZ ISSUE 136



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

A generation-leaping storyline and some silky skiing and sliding slot this remoulding of the online favourite firmly into these hallowed pages. It's a brilliant and original game, even if a few levels are slightly lacklustre.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 147



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games **DEV** VU Games
PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Long in the tooth? Dated? Not one iota. The original *Half-Life* remains a touchstone for every shooter of recent years, and for good reason: it's fantastic, and remains so to this day. Play it again – the magic's still there.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software
PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

It may be a multiplayer game, but the superb bots of *UT2004* still grab it a place in the *PC ZONE* solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.

PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes
PCZ ISSUE 138



RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

NEW ENTRY A brutal and brilliant shooter that's infinitely better than Riddick's cinematic outing. It may have started out life on the Xbox, but that's no reason not to try out its own brand of violence and filth.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Starbreeze
PCZ ISSUE 150

STRATEGY

ROME: TOTAL WAR



An engine that makes grown men cry, AI so great that Hannibal could be in charge and a cinematic tinge that grabs your social life and will not let go. *Rome: Total War* is every inch the champion we knew it would be. A few rough edges appear occasionally, but this is strategy far above anything we've seen in *Medieval: Total War* or anywhere else. The greatest battle simulator ever.

PUB Activision
DEV The Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 148



LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Melding the best of the hardcore and mainstream markets, this strategic gem combines intuitive gameplay with real-life tactics to create an epic, deeply entertaining experience that's dripping with atmosphere.

PUB EA **DEV** EA Pacific
PCZ ISSUE 149



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games
PCZ ISSUE 129



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Best Way
PCZ ISSUE 144



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios
PCZ ISSUE 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive **DEV** Elixir Studios
PCZ ISSUE 132



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

If you're looking for something that doesn't quite fit into the usual template, *Pirates!* is the game for you. With governor's daughters to dally with, trade routes to plunder and land to be lubbered, *Pirates!* is a winner.

PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis
PCZ ISSUE 149



GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCI* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions – strat-fans should check it out.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Massive Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 143



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

An old school charmer with some flash visuals, varied units and super-flash presentation: what *Dawn Of War* loses in dull AI it wins through with sheer orcish belligerence. Multiplayer is pretty smart too.

PUB THQ **DEV** Relic
PCZ ISSUE 147



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios
PCZ ISSUE 135

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, home to the greatest games in the land. This month, there's a whole new **Massively Multiplayer** section (see p134), plus new entries from the rather good *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* and *Need For Speed: Underground 2*

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.

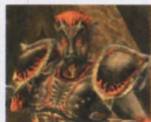
PUB Activision DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorch of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

NEW ENTRY Once you get past the bugs and glitches, *Bloodlines* is a deep, absorbing game that everyone with an interest in the genre should play. Great dialogue, clever plot and (despite the dodgy combat), a superb experience.

PUB Activision DEV Troika Games
PCZ ISSUE 150



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 137

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action-adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

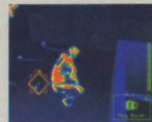
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 138



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Two games in one: a set of excellent, if not revolutionary, missions for Sam Fisher coupled with a scintillating spies vs mercs multiplayer mode. Single-player is more of the same, but that's no bad thing is it?

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 141



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 144



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

He may have gone all moody on us in *Warrior Within*, but we still prefer the Prince's younger, more innocent days of *Sands of Time*. Combat is iffy, granted, but there's a rare charm here that the sequel could not replicate.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 136



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



THE SUFFERING

A survival horror that's refreshingly fast and fluid, *The Suffering* takes place in an Alcatraz-style prison and surprised us with its ingenuity and tension-fused set-pieces. It gets slightly repetitive, but it's worth a ride.

PUB Midway DEV Surreal Software
PCZ ISSUE 145



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the *Raziel* saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'If it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111



EVIL GENIUS

It's always more fun being the bad guy, and when you're an insane megalomaniac it's even better. *Evil Genius* awakens the Blofeld inside you, with all the henchmen, lairs and diabolical plans you could ask for. Basic graphics, ace gameplay.

PUB VU Games DEV Elخير
PCZ ISSUE 147



THE SIMS 2

We still hate *The Sims*, we hate them and everything they stand for, but even we have to admit that the sequel's a good game in itself. We found it addictive and absorbing when we reviewed it – but we'll have changed our tune by the time the fifth expansion pack is dribbled onto the market.

PUB EA DEV Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 147



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 135



SPACE COLONY

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering DEV Firefly Studios
PCZ ISSUE 136



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3

A stirring return for the ride-creating cash-cow that brings with it a snazzy 3D engine and more coasters than you can shake a stick at. It doesn't quite recall the *Theme Park* glory days, but *RT3* is the closest we've been in ages.

PUB Atari DEV Frontier Developments
PCZ ISSUE 149



EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121



SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 125



GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Sick Puppies
PCZ ISSUE 130

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST II



The best just got sooooo much better. As visually alluring as a lingerie-clad supermodel holding a giant meat pie, as full of content as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and as addictive as purple Fruit Pastilles topped with Pringles. Sony has learnt every lesson it could in the five years since the original and produced a MMOG that sets new standards across the board.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 150



CITY OF HEROES

It may not have scored as high as the others in our review, but this spandex-wearing, justice-dispensing, superhero-themed MMOG has certainly won over the popular vote. Long-term appeal may be dubious, but for instant-action fun, it simply can't be beaten.

PUB NCsoft DEV Cryptic Studios
PCZ ISSUE 149



PLANETSIDE

The eternal war for Auraxis just keeps on going, but now with giant battlemechs thrown into the mix. The subterranean *Core Combat* expansion may have disappeared down its own hole, but recent updates have managed to keep the fighting fresh.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 131



EVE ONLINE

Best described as 'Elite Online', the sedate nature of *EVE* has managed to pull in more and more space traders with each passing month. It may not be the most human of MMOGs, but it's definitely worth putting the time into it considering what you get back.

PUB CCP DEV CCP
PCZ ISSUE 130



ANARCHY ONLINE

Quirky science-fiction action abounds in this ever-popular take on mankind's distant future. Two major expansions (one practically bigger than the original game) and a forthcoming graphical overhaul is doing more than enough to keep the world of Rubi-ka buzzing.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom
PCZ ISSUE 148



FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE

Probably the best of the non-EverQuest fantasy MMOGs (although not by much), this Japanese entry into the genre is about as fully realised a world as you can get. The controls may be cumbersome, but you can't deny the atmosphere that lies within.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Square Enix
PCZ ISSUE 148



DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

The fantasy version of *PlanetSide* (although without the FPS-trappings) is still going strong, despite firm opposition. It's starting to show its age now, although a graphical overhaul due in a few months time might be enough to keep it competitive.

PUB Mythic Entertainment DEV Mythic Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 149



STAR WARS GALAXIES

Jump To Lightspeed has recently added the final piece of the *Star Wars* jigsaw – space combat – but is it too little, too late? There's a loyal audience of Jedi wannabes in there, but the Force is growing weaker. Nonetheless, there's still plenty to admire here, including a superb skill system.

PUB Activision DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 151



EVERQUEST

The original can't compare to its sequel in terms of looks and polished gameplay, but five years of expansions have kept its half a million regular players more than happy. There's more on the way too, just in case you feel like keeping it old school.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 149



SECOND LIFE

Not so much a game, more a second way of life. Live your dreams, fulfil your fantasies and get off with the hottie in the next virtual house at one of the many, many sexually-charged parties. Warning: dangerously addictive and definitely for adults only!

PUB Linden Research, Inc. DEV Linden Research, Inc
NOT REVIEWED

ONLINE SHOOTERS

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around. The new Onslaught mode has given a new dimension to the series, adding tactical awareness to the list of skills online shootists need to master. It even plays well offline, making *UT2004* the definitive choice.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Not much in single-player, but online this Swedish gem has redefined the way online shooters work. Infantry, jeeps, tanks, planes, bombers, ships – the total WWII experience (minus the searing horror and psychological scarring for life).

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

150 players! Count 'em. Some say a world record (although *PlanetSide* begs to disagree), this is modern-day online warfare at its finest. Quality maps, plenty of vehicles and the best helicopters in the business – why, it even has useful mortars.

PUB NovalLogic DEV NovalLogic

PCZ ISSUE 145



BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Take *BF1942*, drop it into the '60s and bingo – the total Vietnam war experience. More claustrophobic than *BF1942*, which suits the jungle warfare period setting, this has a great '60s mood: all it needs is the late Brando and it'd be perfect.

PUB EA DEV DICE Canada

PCZ ISSUE 141



COUNTER-STRIKE SOURCE

The daddy of all online shooters is back, running on the jaw-dropping *Half-Life 2* engine. All your favourites are here – Dust, Italy, Office – all with realistic physics. The only thing missing is HL2's ability to pick up objects, but it's surely only a mod away.

DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131



GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117



TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

The most comprehensive driving game on the PC, *TOCA 2* is a must-have if you're into motors. With 15 different motorsports to master, 52 tracks and rival drivers with good AI smarts, it's the best racer on the market.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 142



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fifth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With excellent damage modelling and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 148



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

NEW ENTRY A sequel that's both bling and wicked, *NFSU2* capitalises on its predecessor's might with a superb free-roam mode, astounding graphics and even more mods, nips and tucks for your motor. It's most definitely very whack.

PUB EA DEV EA

PCZ ISSUE 150

SPORT

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005



Eidos and the *Champ Man* licence have got a hell of a lot to beat in Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* – easily the most streamlined and absorbing management game to come out of its stable to date. It's management in its purest form, with an improved match engine working under the bonnet of a sparkling (well, green and gray) redesigned interface. We're just as addicted as we always were.

PUB Sega DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 149



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Fact. This is the finest arcade football game ever. Incomparably better than any *FIFA* offering, *PES* is the only footie game that plays like the real thing – with all the joys and agonies that entails.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 149



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

Some new game modes gives 2005's *Tiger* 'em up some welcome variety – although even without them, it would remain the PC's premier golf sim. This year is a good vintage too, with visuals to die for.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148



NHL 2005

Shiny and beautiful, yet nowhere near as vapid as its *FIFA* compatriot, EA's *NHL* series continues its run of consistent excellence. Better AI, better production and as slick as they come.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

3D ACTION / STRATEGY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

With a real Boy's Own-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.

PUB Gathering DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 136



RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127



FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

A remarkably innovative military simulator, *FSW* provides tense urban combat with you in a commanding role – despite feeling as if you're in the line of fire with your two fire-teams. It gets repetitive, but it's worth a look.

PUB THQ DEV Pandemic Studios

PCZ ISSUE 147



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put into improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

XMAS CHAOS

DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ If you're reading this, then congratulations are due. You've made it through the social minefield that is the festive season, alive and sane. You may have been forced to endure such hardships as sustaining a conversation at your work Christmas party with the sad IT guy, or perhaps you just had to stomach the obligatory sloppy kiss from your nan with the whiskers. Whatever you did, Christmas is inevitably a busy time of year, and in a sick twist of fate, it always clashes with the time when you're most likely to have an overload of gaming goodness on your PC. Maybe what's needed is for developers to insert code into games that changes the entire cast's textures to Christmas outfits. After all, apart from the obvious giggles to be had watching a Santa-clad Gordon Freeman being attacked by tinsel-trailing headcrabs, it would make the perfect excuse to duck out of the embarrassing ordeal of playing charades with the in-laws.

But with the festive season now past and the hangovers fading, it's time to start looking ahead, with our sneak look at the biggest titles of 2005 (including *Battlefield 2*, *Black & White 2* and *F.E.A.R.*). Once you've done that, head over to the movies section to view Crytek and ATI's new Machinima release "The Project", which gives a hint as to what the *Far Cry* developer is up to next.

And, as always, there are the latest demos, movies and more to keep you thoroughly entertained. Happy New Year!

THE BIGGEST PC GAMES OF 2005

CD1/DVD

2004 WAS, without doubt, a golden year for games. After enjoying titles such as *Half-Life 2*, *Rome* and *Far Cry*, you might be wondering if there's anything left

to get excited about. Well, fear not. We've searched high and low to find the best games of 2005 this issue, and the best movies too, giving you a visual taste of the incredible titles you'll be playing this year.

Of the 39 movies we've managed to collate for you this issue, we've hand-picked the tastiest for your closer inspection

BEST OF THE BUNCH



BATTLEFIELD 2

With *Battlefield 2*'s heritage and the extra efforts of the *Desert Combat* team on board, this sequel promises magnificent things. Watch out for more on DICE's super-shooter next month.



BLACK & WHITE 2

Peter Molyneux's god sim looks set to reinvent every aspect of the original game. The creatures alone are amazing – check out the animation and detail in this video of the new wolf character.



BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30

Gearbox has gone all-out in researching this WWII shooter, and it certainly shows in this cinematic trailer that sets the scene for the game's intense squad-based action.



F.E.A.R.

In case you missed it last month, or just wanted to see it again, this movie features 13 minutes of footage from Monolith's stunning FPS. It's visually impressive, violent and chaotic – and we love it.



IMPERIAL GLORY

Rome: Total War has definitely raised the bar in the world of strategic warfare, but we have to say that *Imperial Glory* is looking pretty nifty. In particular, watch out the epic battles on show.



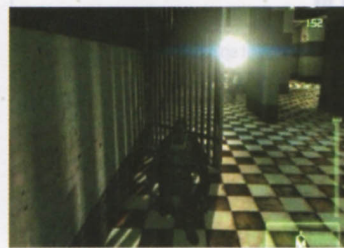
THE MOVIES

Rather than an in-game clip, take a look at "It Came From Uranus," Peter Molyneux's very own movie produced with the in-game movie creator. Could this be a revolution for Machinima?



STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

Squad-based military action comes to the *Star Wars* universe for the first time in the promising *Republic Commando*. This movie shows why we can't wait for the chance to see giant Wookiees.



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

Apart from some amazingly cool knife moves, Sam Fisher's next outing boasts a gorgeous new graphics engine and the addition of co-operative multiplayer levels.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

With *EverQuest II* receiving 95% in these pages and players the world over clamouring for its release, *WoW* has a lot to live up to. This clip shows some of the ways it's going to prove itself.



IMPORTANT!

You can find all of the content here on the DVD, but we can't cram everything onto the two CDs. This is because we can get more than six times the content on our double-sided DVD, including a

library of patches and utilities, along with DVD-video (that you can watch on your TV), bigger movies and more playable demos. Demos and movies are getting bigger all the time, and certain

games are going to be released on DVD-only. If you still haven't upgraded to DVD, do it now. You can pick up a cheap drive for about £20, so there's no excuse. Unless you're a real piker.

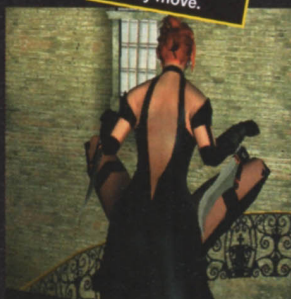
BLOODRAYNE 2

CD2/DVD Pub: VU Games Dev: Terminal Reality

IN THE world of vampires, BloodRayne seems to be doing all right for herself. Far from just holing up in her coffin between games, she's appeared topless in an issue of *Playboy*, has set the wheels in motion on her own film and will feature as the star of her own comic too. Meanwhile, this demo sees her making her way through the Mansion level, where you can test out all her bloodthirsty skills.



That's a terrible waste of red wine.



Damn this ping-pong ball...

CHALLENGE SUZY!

FEMME FATALE
Complete the level by killing everyone using only the Fatality move.

DISPATCHES

In the wake of films like *Blade*, *Underworld* and *Van Helsing*, the ante has been upped substantially on over-the-top vampiric assassinations. Never one to be bettered, the lusty Bloodrayne has a repertoire all of her own...



RAIL SLIDE

We knew those impractical stilettos must be good for something... Jump onto a rail and grind down while using your Carpathian Dragons to take out oncoming enemies.



FATAL ATTRACTION

BloodRayne can perform a number of Fatality moves while draining an enemy's O-positive. Spectacular and gory, these are our favourite way of taking those suckers down.



POWER TO THE PEOPLE

BloodRayne has three special powers to call on. Aura Sense and Dilated Perception are pretty handy, but Blood Rage is best of all, upping both your attack and defence abilities.

PAINKILLER

DVD ONLY Pub: DreamCatcher Dev: People Can Fly
Rev: Issue 142, 83%



TO COINCIDE with the release of the *Battle Out Of Hell* expansion, DreamCatcher has released this new demo of *Painkiller*. This hard-working FPS has done amazing things since it launched, even beating *Doom 3* as the preferred competition game for the CPL World Tour. This demo features the Military Base level, and shows off exactly why *Painkiller*'s caused such a stir.

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

The Military Base level features a satisfying mix of confined, frantic fighting and more sedate action over wide, open expanses. Here are a few highlights from the tougher sections...



MISSILE SILO

This area is extremely cramped and the enemies are hand-picked to cause a headache. If you come across the guys with flame-throwers, a well-placed shot into their weapon should make demon giblets.



ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS

These might be bolted to the ground, but they pack a mean punch if they get a direct hit on you. Take out any surrounding enemies and strafe like hell while using the rocket launcher to take them out.



TANKS

You may not see these buggers coming, as they're fond of crashing through walls and out of hangars. Be prepared to swap to the rocket launcher in a hurry! Again, continuous strafing is a necessity.

CHALLENGE SUZY!

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE
Take out all enemies except tanks and gun emplacements using just the Painkiller weapon.

IMMORTAL CITIES: CHILDREN OF THE NILE

DVD Pub: Sega Europe
Dev: Tilted Mill Entertainment

IF SOMETIMES the chaos of the FPS gets too much for you and you'd prefer something a bit more sedate, then *Children of the Nile*'s demo, featuring the scenarios Dawn of Civilization and Enlightenment, could be just what you need to unwind. We recommend its gentle view of Egyptian civilisation as the perfect remedy for a stinking hangover.



KOHAN II: KINGS OF WAR

DVD Pub: Take 2 Dev: TimeGate Studios Rev: Issue 147, 75%

FANTASY-BASED strategy is an over-subscribed genre at the moment, but this demo should demonstrate why *Kohan II* stands out from the pack. There are two tutorials to get you up to speed, one campaign mission to test out your skills and a multiplayer map generator to enable you to challenge other players.



ARMIES OF EXIGO MULTIPLAYER

DVD Pub: EA Dev: Black Hole Games Rev: Issue 151, 70%

ANOTHER good-looking fantasy RTS, this time boasting simultaneous action above and below ground. This multiplayer demo allows you to test your RTS mettle online, playing as any of the game's three races: the Empire, the Beasts or the Fallen. Four maps are on offer, from the snowy Spider Realm to the wooded Fronts.



● ALSO ON THE DVD
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury, *Virtual RC Racing*, demos of five titles from the new Indie Zone

THE INCREDIBLES

CD2/DVD Pub: THQ Dev: Heavy Iron Studios

IF YOU'VE seen (and inevitably fallen in love with) Pixar's excellent new super-spoof, you may well be inclined to shove this demo in and give it a whirl. Featuring the slightly out of shape crime-fighter Mr Incredible, the demo is pretty standard action fare, and sees you biffing your way through hordes of enemies in the Robot Arena level.





MOVIES

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

FAR CRY THE PROJECT

CD2/DVD This movie of ATI and Crytek's Machinima has been gorgeously rendered by cutting-edge Radeon X800 graphics technology, so there's no need to worry about frame rates here!



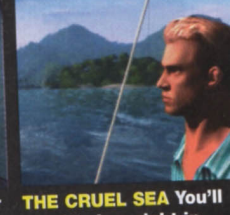
CHARACTERS Looks like he had a dodgy vindaloo last night...



ENVIRONMENTS Intricate and high-res - better than *Doom 3*?



MUTANTS A Trigen prepares for some root canal work



THE CRUEL SEA You'll want to hop right in...

ALSO SHOWING...



WEEBL/WOBBL AND BOB (DVD ONLY) - Weebl and Bob (known in the world beyond the Internet as Wobbl and Bob due to litigious toy-making organisations) star here in an exclusive **PC ZONE** cartoon available only on our wonderful DVD. If you haven't seen the characters before, the key to the humour is that Weebl likes pie.
DON'T MISS - Weebl liking pie.



HALF-LIFE 2 (CD 2/DVD ONLY) - This movie shows what must have been a prototype of the much-loved Gravity Gun from Valve's masterful FPS. Its neat features include the ability to stick objects together and move human bodies about. Modders of the world - you have a duty to bring this to reality!
DON'T MISS - Sticking things together to make what looks like a giant handle.



BATTLEFIELD 2 (DVD ONLY) - The *Battlefield* clan Northern Brigade (nbrigade.com) was lucky enough to get invited to DICE to try their hand at a pre-alpha build of *Battlefield 2*. Now you too can watch in amazement at their breathtaking compilation of footage taken from the visit on the DVD.
DON'T MISS - The Cobra helicopter vs the tank battle.



MAKE SOMETHING UNREAL FINALISTS (DVD ONLY) - In case you've been living under a rock, the Make Something Unreal contest is the ultimate showcase of what the *UT2004* engine is capable of. Most of the mods have appeared on the discs in the past, but look out for a Make Something Unreal special soon...
DON'T MISS - The sheer scope of mods on offer, from top-down tactical affairs to racing!

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** The gambling system from *Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle*

EXTENDED PLAY

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE MAP PACK



Goodbye dusty streets, hello rich, verdant foliage.

MOST OF US have at least dabbled with *Counter-Strike: Source*, especially now that the entire world has *Half-Life 2*. Of those yet to be convinced, many have complained about the lack of new maps in the update, which is why we've made sure to bring you this excellent map pack compiled by the folks at www.punkassfraggers.com. There are 28 maps in total, from completely new territory to modern takes on the much-loved *cs_assault* and *de_inferno* from *Counter-Strike 1.6*, so there should be something to keep you going - at least until the next map pack (which we're promised will be even more outstanding). Don't miss *zt_assault* - a beautiful remake of a classic C-S map.

FAR CRY THE PROJECT

ATI AND Crytek's collaboration is available here in full-engine flavour, enabling you to run the entire sequence in real-time and full-screen. Be warned though - it's pretty hard going for any machine and we only recommend it if you've got a top-end machine. On a positive note, this could be a good indicator of how well your PC will run Crytek's next game!



"It's my turn to operate..."

ROME: TOTAL WAR UNIT

CREATIVE Assembly's masterpiece may already be the strategy game of 2004 (and indeed, the third best game in our Supertest on page 92), but you can now make it even better with the help of this alternative Peloponnesian-era Spartan Hoplite model. Simply use the new unit to overwrite your existing Spartan and enjoy the enhanced good looks of this skirt-wearing spearman.



HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry - phone our helpline on 01225 442244 and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk.
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If you're calling the helpline:

■ If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.

■ If this is not possible, note down all relevant information - ie system type,

soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

■ Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

■ To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.

■ Future Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.



Half-Life co-op reborn.

UPDATED CO-OP SUPPORT FOR HALF-LIFE SP

THE POPULAR *Sven Co-op* mod has been around for years now, but the ability to play the original *Half-Life* single-player maps was mostly targeted towards large numbers of players. This recent update, however, has been optimised for small numbers of players and it's been done so well it feels a lot more like Valve's original. If you've finished *Half-Life 2*, why not gather your mates and give it a go?

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Doom 3* SDK, *Men Of Valor* Multiplayer Bonus Pack, *Ground Control II* SDK & "Water Ways" map, *MOH: Pacific Assault* Mod Developer's Kit and five *Warcraft: The Frozen Throne* maps

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GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

BLACK & WHITE

Surrounded by hype and rumours, **Martin Korda** looks at Lionhead's first game, which took over the lives of those who created it and left a lasting impression on the world of gaming...

IT'S 4AM at the Lionhead offices and a bleary-eyed collection of artists, programmers and designers are gathered around the company's Webcam holding a large piece of cardboard. The makeshift board simply reads 'It's Finished', a statement that proclaims the completion of one of the most hyped and highly anticipated games in history to the world. The game? *Black & White*.

Four years earlier in 1997, *Black & White* was no more than an idea on a page. In fact, it was no more than one idea, that had come to gaming guru Peter Molyneux while he was stuck in a traffic jam. It was an acorn of inspiration fighting for life at a time when Peter was taking his first tentative steps towards setting up his new development company Lionhead Studios, just days after leaving the first company he'd nurtured to greatness, Bullfrog.

"Lionhead was started in July 1997," recalls Peter. "I came out of Bullfrog feeling a bit jaded. I'd lost that sense of family that Bullfrog had, something I really wanted to rediscover with Lionhead."

And so Peter, along with a handful of friends and associates, sat down one

night in a pub and started discussing potential ideas for their new company's debut game. But while several of the ideas looked promising, it was god game *Black & White* that stood out from the crowd. Within days, development of the project began.

BACK TO BASICS

"When we started the game, there was absolutely nothing there," explains Peter. "We had to start everything from scratch. We went to PC World and bought five machines, then built a test-bed which let us play a very primitive version of the game."

From very early on, Peter and his team had a clear idea of what they wanted from *Black & White*. "The original idea was to make the player a powerful being who could influence people and the world. We wanted it to be a playground that you could make as beautiful or as scary as you wanted it to

be. We wanted your land to be able to change from one extreme to the other," says Peter. "Most god games only allowed you to influence a couple of things, so we came up with the idea of having a physical manifestation of yourself on earth."

In the final version of the game, the physical manifestation of the player was an animal, a creature that could be nurtured from birth and moulded into the player's own image. But it wasn't always this way. "Originally we wanted to make it a giant man, but this created some major issues

when we started slapping it," remembers Peter. "It felt very emotionally disturbing. So we decided to change it into a creature."

One of the many common misconceptions about *B&W* was that it was a hideously delayed title, an assumption that still rankles with Peter.

PROFILE



NAME: Peter Molyneux

ROLE ON B&W:

Head of company and lead designer

FIRST GAME WORKED ON:

The Entrepreneur

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Still head of Lionhead Studios and currently working on several titles including *Black & White 2* and *The Movies*.



NAME: Jonty Barnes

ROLE ON B&W:

Lead programmer

FIRST GAME WORKED ON:

Powermonger

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Head of Black & White Studios and leading the development team on *Black & White 2*.



NAME: Mark Webley

ROLE ON B&W:

Production director

FIRST GAME WORKED ON:

Theme Park

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Still at Lionhead and just finished working on the Xbox RPG *Fable*.



NAME: Alex Evans

ROLE ON B&W:

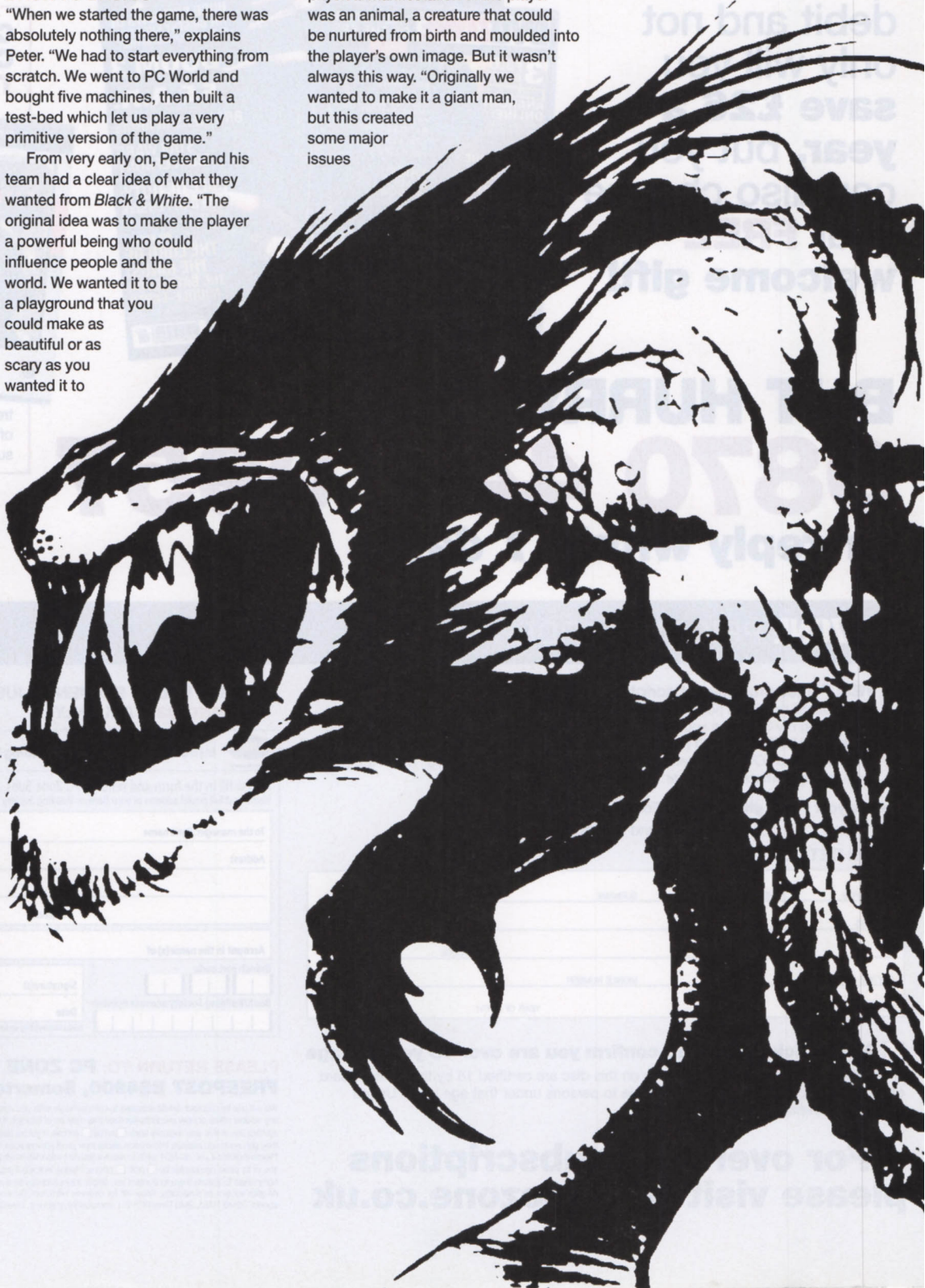
3D programmer

FIRST GAME WORKED ON:

Dungeon Keeper

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Still at Lionhead working on research and development.





"Many people think that *B&W* was late, but when you think about it, the first line of code was written in February 1998 and the game was released in early 2001. It was three years, going from nothing and starting with a team of five people to having a finished game. It was actually done very quickly when you consider the circumstances. We announced *B&W* at E3 1998 on the back of a concept, and because we announced it so early, it lingered in people's minds for so long that it felt like it was delayed."

HYPER

It wasn't long after the E3 announcement that *B&W* fansites began to sprout like mushrooms after a downpour, a phenomenon that was to see both expectations and anticipation for the game spiral out of control. By the end of 1998, *Black & White* was already the subject of feverish speculation and excitement both in the press and the public.

Jonty Barnes, now head of Black & White Studios and leading the development of *B&W*'s sequel, recalls just how out of control expectations soared. "It was very hard for us to communicate exactly what *Black & White* was to the public and because of that, the hype started to get out of control."

However, it wasn't only people's expectations that were spiralling out of control, as Peter and his team soon discovered. "There was an amazing amount of hype generated for *B&W*," recounts Peter. "There were all of these fansites that were mooted features that weren't even planned for the game. Basically, they were making them up. One fansite would say, 'Wouldn't it be great if *B&W* had this or that' and the



GAME Black & White

DEVELOPER Lionhead Studios

PUBLISHER EA

RELEASED 2001

INFLUENCED As seems to be the case with many of Molyneux's games, it's hard to pin down *Black & White*'s exact influence in terms of copycat titles, thanks to its massively original approach. To many, the game's influence was mainly one of technological advancements and pushing the boundaries of freeform gameplay, as it proved to be the first title to feature morphing/ageing characters and a truly living, breathing world with which to interact. Similar ideas and features can be seen to varying degrees in the likes of *Half-Life 2*, *Republic: The Revolution*, *The Movies* and the Xbox RPG *Fable*. However, perhaps the game's greatest achievement was to provide a bedrock on which Lionhead could be built, allowing the company to flourish and expand so that it could attempt to further push the boundaries of imagination and originality – something often lacking in many of today's games.

next thing we knew, another fansite was saying that it had heard that *B&W* was definitely going to have this feature in it. Then the next fansite would say that it had seen and played the new feature. It was out of our control. In the end, we started trying to shove features into the game that had been started by these rumours, just to try and satisfy the fans."

RAISING THE BAR

But hype wasn't the only obstacle the team encountered, thanks in part to the small size of the team (just 24 in total), and to the company's determination to constantly raise the bar in terms of quality, originality and technology.

Alex Evans, one of the project's 3D programmers, remembers this steely determination well. "When we first animated the creatures, we did such a good job that it raised everyone's expectations of the game. So then we decided to put in thousands of villagers. Every time we managed to do things like that we'd raise the bar further. When I'd done the weather effects, Peter decided he wanted me to get the game to connect to the Internet and reflect the local weather for each player. That kind of thing was happening all the time."

"In the end, we barely left the office in 2001, but no-one minded, because everyone really felt like they owned their part of the game. *B&W* felt like our baby and we all felt responsible for it. It had that combination of Peter driving it

"Everyone felt like they owned their part of the game. *Black & White* felt like our baby"

ALEX EVANS 3D PROGRAMMER, BLACK & WHITE



Don't even think about curling one off on my lawn!



Good and Evil advisors were always on hand to offer advice.



Creature playing up? Give it a slap. *B&W* featured breathtaking levels.



"Tonight Matthew, I'm a Thundercat!"

from a game that just looked beautiful to a game we could actually play," says Jonty. "It was an amazing moment when we played it and found it actually worked. There was still loads to do, but you could see how the living, breathing world worked. It re-energised everyone and I think that weekend was the highlight of the whole game."

AND RELAX...

And so, after years of intense round-the-clock graft, the game was finally completed in the early hours of a winter morning, celebrated with the now infamous 'It's Finished' message broadcast over the Internet. Within minutes of the image appearing Online, the Lionhead messageboards lit up with posts from all over the world from fans who'd been waiting impatiently for this very moment. Comments such as, 'I can go to bed now that I know it's finished' were commonplace, again

highlighting the feverish level of hype and expectation surrounding the game.

Several months later, after it'd been tested, approved, pressed and packaged, *B&W* was released on the now paying public, many of whom had expected *B&W* to be released the day after the announcement. Copies flew off the shelves at an unprecedented speed and the press lavished the game with some of the highest review scores

in history. But not everyone was happy.

As is often the case with overly-hyped products, *Black & White* couldn't live up to many people's unrealistic expectations. While many hardcore god gamers embraced its original approach, more casual gamers simply couldn't get to grips with it,

labelling it as a beautiful but unfathomable and unclear game.

The truth was probably somewhere in-between. Undoubtedly, *Black & White* was a work of art, originality and creativity, triumphant in pushing

DID YOU KNOW?

Apparently, if you make a hand gesture in the shape of crenellations while your creature is on a leash, a little ringing phone box appears on the south east coast of the island that allows you to listen to a conversation between Alex and head of Black & White Studios, Jonty Barnes.

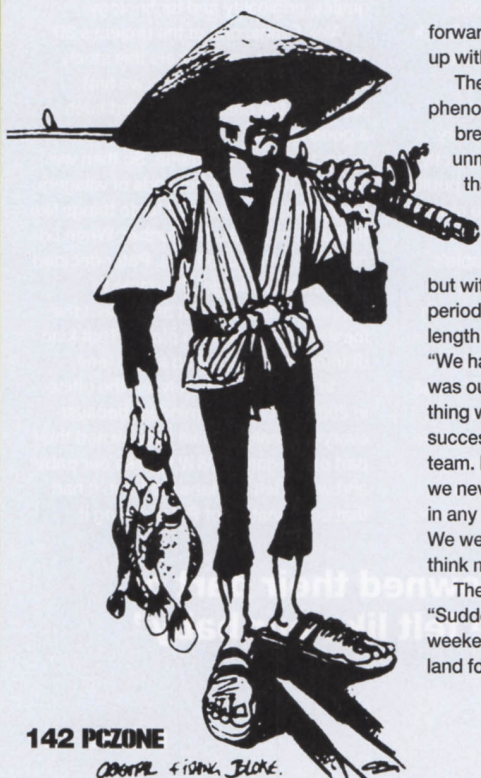
VOICES IN MY HEAD

DID SOMEONE CALL ME?

We've all heard of them, you might have even experienced them. I'm talking about easter eggs (or funny extras covertly coded into the game by its developer), which are commonplace in many games. *Black & White* was no exception.

Perhaps the most unsettling of these was the Spooky Voice easter egg. "We recorded the top 20 most popular names in each country with a really spooky voice," explains Alex Evans, one of the 3D programmers on the game.

"Then, if you played it really late at night, the game would search your machine for your Windows username or login name. If it matched one of these names, you'd hear it spoken in this eerie voice. People shat themselves. Within days of the game shipping, all of these comments started appearing on messageboards swearing they'd heard their name spoken in the middle of the night."



forward with wild ideas, while we came up with a great engine to do it justice."

The results were visually phenomenal, a game with a living, breathing world of (at the time) unmatched beauty and detail, thanks to the utter dedication of Lionhead's staff. "Most games have a crunch period of between three and six months,

but with *Black & White*, the crunch period was pretty much the entire length of the project," recalls Jonty. "We had to prove ourselves as this was our first project, and the great thing was that we all wanted to get success for every member of the team. It was an evolving project and we never wanted to say no to putting in any new feature we came up with. We were working crazy hours - I don't think my body could do it again."

Then one day, it all came together. "Suddenly, there was this one weekend when we could finally play a land for the first time. The game went

technological boundaries and embracing freeform gameplay in a way never before touched upon by a game. However, this freeform nature was also an area of confusion for many players, with the world and creature often reacting in unclear and unexplained ways. This is something that the team at Black & White Studios is attempting to rectify in the sequel.

"For some people, *Black & White* really didn't deliver what they were expecting," explains Jonty. "We received an abundance of feedback from the game, some positive and some very

negative. It wasn't a perfect game, and that's what we're addressing now."

YOU'VE GOT THE BRAINS...

If *Black & White* proved one thing, it was that creativity still had a very major role to play in games development.

"I haven't seen any games that have tried to imitate *Black & White*, but I think it inspired a lot more companies to go out and innovate, even though it had its faults," says Mark Webley, production director on *Black & White*. "Unfortunately, just because we did something as innovative as *B&W* doesn't



FAMILY TREE

It's no exaggeration to say that no game since *Black & White* has ever truly attempted to copy its eclectic mix of ideas and genres. However, its influence can be seen throughout the games industry as a shining beacon of originality and freeform gameplay for other developers to aspire to...



mean that publishers then turned around and allowed other smaller developers to have the same creative freedom. But I think the bigger companies have certainly been able to have more control over their work since *Black & White*."

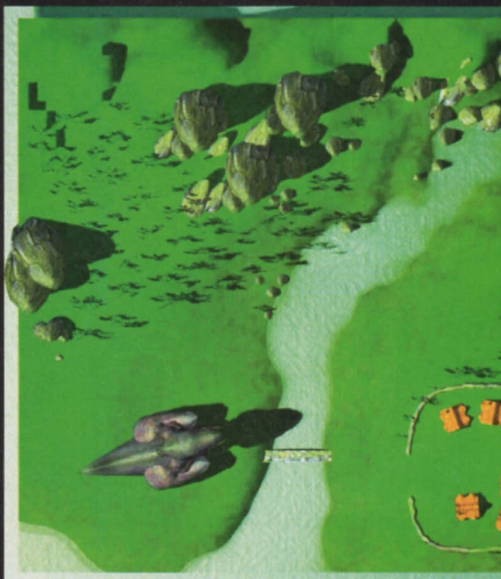
EASY TO SAY NOW, BUT...

Looking back, Peter is equally philosophical about the game and its influence. "The hype damaged the game and we did make mistakes with it. *B&W* was the first game I'd worked on that wasn't just a collection of levels. It had a story, and had to be simple enough for kids to play, yet complex enough for adults too. That worked to a certain extent, but we spent too long on the first three hours of the game, which sadly also ended up being the worst three.

"However, it was incredible how open the team was to new ideas – you wouldn't get that today. There was a feeling that we were doing something

important that had never been done before. We started something with *B&W* – we tried to be different. I'm proud that we tried to do it, to make a game that was totally dissimilar to any other game, from the interface to the overall concept. Plus, technology-wise it did a lot of new things and I don't think *B&W* has, or ever will be, imitated straight off. More importantly though, I think it proved that you can make a big title without it having to be attached to a big licence."

Ultimately, *Black & White* proved that developers could be left to their own devices to create great, original games without the intervention of publishers. It paved the way for a greater level of autonomy for many other development houses such as Valve Software, Epic and Gearbox Software, and provided a base from which Lionhead has flourished. It may have had its faults, but its influence on the world of gaming shouldn't be underestimated. [E]



Molyneux wanted a 'from above' view. Here's an early version.



Your creature started off little larger than a child.



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